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# **Experiences of Military Culture and Identity**

**Lee Robinson**

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

**Coventry University, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences University of  
Warwick, Department of Psychology**

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## **Abbreviations**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>MSW</b>    | Military Servicewomen                                  |
| <b>UK</b>     | United Kingdom   |
| <b>US</b>     | United States  |
| <b>DOD</b>    | Department of Defense                                  |
| <b>OEF</b>    | Operation Enduring Freedom                             |
| <b>OIF</b>    | Operation Iraqi Freedom                                |
| <b>MOD</b>    | Ministry of Defence                                    |
| <b>PILOTS</b> | Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress |
| <b>ASSIA</b>  | Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts            |
| <b>QFA</b>    | Quality Framework Assessment                           |
| <b>VA</b>     | Veterans Administration                                |
| <b>IED</b>    | Improvised Explosive Device                            |
| <b>IPA</b>    | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis               |
| <b>RLC</b>    | Royal Logistics Corps                                  |
| <b>BPS</b>    | British Psychological Society                          |

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### **Declaration**

This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or to any other institution. The thesis was carried out under the academic and clinical supervision of Dr. Helen Liebling (Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Coventry University), Dr. Dan Barnard (Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust, and Dr. Felicity Gilbey (Clinical Psychologist, Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust) all of whom were involved in the initial formulation of ideas and the development of the research design. Apart from the collaborations stated, all the material presented in this thesis is my own work. The literature review is written for submission to the Journal of International Women's Studies and the empirical paper is written for submission to the British Journal of Psychology.

## Summary

Periods of operational deployment contain unique experiences for military servicemen and servicewomen. Previous research has focused on the experiences of regular personnel and their families. Given the increased presence of reservists in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the proposals to include military servicewomen in frontline combat roles, further exploration of the needs of these populations is required. This thesis increases understanding of military identity and culture at a time when the number of servicewomen and reservists requiring care from the National Health Service is likely to increase significantly.

Chapter one is a critical review of the qualitative research exploring military servicewomen's experiences of deployment. Database and manual searches resulted in 13 studies being included in the review. Military servicewomen described experiencing widespread gender-based discrimination implicitly supported by a patriarchal military culture that eroded their military and feminine identities. The findings revealed that this has significant implications for their long-term wellbeing. The review highlights the need for radical culture change in the military that continues to view women as counter to the revered masculinity viewed as a requirement for combat. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

Chapter two is a qualitative research study that explored reservists' lived experiences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the study provides an in-depth account of the shifting identities of the reservists as they transition from civilian to soldier and back to civilian following deployment. The study reveals how their military identities are formed and crystallised by the deployment experience, leaving them detached from their former civilian selves. Implications for clinical practice and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Chapter three is a reflective account exploring the integration of contextual identities within diverse roles. It explores the parallels between the research subject and the multiple roles of the clinical psychologist.

**Overall word count: 19,291**

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

### **Military servicewomen's experiences of deployment: A systematic review of qualitative literature**

*Written in preparation for submission to Journal of International Women Studies.  
(See appendix A for author guidelines)*

*Overall chapter word count (excluding tables, figures and references): 7954*



## **1.0 Abstract**

There is a paucity of in-depth and qualitative research into military servicewomen's (MSW) experiences during deployment and reintegration into civilian life post-deployment, compared to their male military colleagues. The primary aim of the present review was to critically evaluate empirical findings of qualitative studies that have explored the deployment experiences of MSW. A systematic literature search yielded 13 studies. MSW reported experiences of widespread sexual discrimination, harassment and assault, which challenged their military identity. Furthermore, MSW experienced a variety of challenges to both military and civilian identity post-deployment. Clinical and research implications are considered.

## **1.1 Introduction**

### **1.1.1 The Changing Deployment of Military Servicewomen (MSW)**

Women represent 10.2% (15,280) of the United Kingdom (UK) Regular military, 13.8% (4,890) of UK volunteer reserve (Defence Statistics, 2016), and a little over 16.6% (207,438) of the United States (US) active duty personnel (Department of Defense; DOD, 2017). Since the beginning of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, over 150,000 United States (US) MSW have been deployed overseas. In excess of 160 US MSW have died during those deployments, thousands seriously injured (DOD, 2011a; 2011b), and a significant number continue to live with significant mental health difficulties as a result of their deployment experiences (DOD, 2010).

MSW are often enlisted in non-combat support roles, including the military police, logistics, medics, and intelligence. Recent conflicts have been characterised by urban guerilla fighting, a type of military action using small, mobile, irregular forces to carry out sudden attacks (Street, Vogt & Dutra, 2009). As a result, non-combat support roles still represent the risk of serious injury and death (Boyd, Bradshaw, & Robinson, 2013; Hoge, Clark, & Castro, 2007). Indeed, around 31% of MSW report exposure to death, 9% had witnessed killing, 7% had suffered from combat injuries, and 4% had killed (Maguen, Luxton, Skopp, & Madden, 2012; Dutra, Gubbs, Greene & Trego *et al.*, 2011). This level of combat-related exposure is comparable to that of male military personnel (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007).

### **1.1.2 Sexual violence and gender-based harassment**

In addition to general deployment-related stressors, 12–15% of MSW report gender-based harassment, unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and sexual assault (e.g. Kelly, Berkel, & Nilsson, 2014; Kelly, Nilsson, & Berkel, 2014; Murdoch, Pryor, Polusny, & Gacksetter, 2007). They also report demeaning and humiliating behaviour based purely on biological sex differences (Street *et al.*, 2009). These abuses and related mental health issues not only impact their deployment experiences, but researchers have argued they may also affect post-deployment adjustment (Kimberling, Gima, Smith, Street, & Frayne, 2007; Street *et al.*, 2009).

### **1.1.3 Social support networks during deployment**

Previous research has noted that unit cohesion serves to buffer the negative effects of deployment, whilst keeping the unit together to carry out its mission (Figley, 1978; Kulka, Schlenger, Fairbank & Hough *et al.*, 1990). Research has found that women and men differ in the types of structural support they utilise during deployment, with men frequently reporting larger social networks that are less intensive, and women reporting less extensive but more intense social networks (Thoits, 1995). MSW deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan reported less social support from peers (Street *et al.*, 2009). Socially supportive relationships amongst military personnel have been identified as a major resilience factor for military-related stressors, including those associated with combat exposure (Bliese, 2006; Griffith & Vaitkus, 1999). MSW's lower perceived social support could therefore put them at greater risk of post-deployment health difficulties. However, this issue has not yet been empirically examined for those who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan

#### **1.1.4 Gender-based role conflict**

Recent studies suggest that 40% of MSW have children (DOD, 2006), and with rising divorce rates reported for MSW (Adler-Baeder, Pittman & Taylor, 2006) more than 30,000 single mothers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (DOD, 2010). Studies examining the effects of deployments upon military mothers and their children have reported separation anxiety, inadequate maternal role functioning, poor emotional functioning, depression and anxiety (Ternus, 2009). Consequently, when MSW deploy, their responsibilities need to be divided amongst spouses, family members, or friends, contributing to MSWs' deployment-related stress (Vogt, Pless, King & King, 2005). Deployment stress may be particularly profound for women of the National Guard or reserve. In comparison to active duty women, those from the National Guard or reserve require transition from usual civilian employment; have prolonged departure from family and less social support from home communities (Foster, 2011).

#### **1.1.5 Rationale**

##### **1.1.5.1 A need for renewed focus on MSW**

There is a paucity of in-depth and qualitative research into MSW's experiences during deployment and reintegration into civilian life post-deployment compared to their male military colleagues. DOD and Ministry Of Defence (MOD) policy changes have expanded the occupational roles available to women serving in the military (Mulhall, 2009), broadening their exposure to combat-related experiences and stressors associated with deployment. In July 2016, the Secretary of State for Defence Michael Fallon, advised that British MSW would be serving in frontline

ground combat roles from November 2016 (MOD, 2016).

#### **1.1.5.2 Methodological issues**

Researchers investigating the experiences of deployment for MSW have predominantly relied upon quantitative methodology. This is based on reductionist philosophies, and the pursuit of objective reality (Robson, 2002). The complex processes and perceptions relating to women's experiences of deployment are unlikely to be articulated with any profundity by this approach alone. Qualitative methodology presents the opportunity to investigate the in-depth and lived experiences of MSW, incorporating multiple meanings and perspectives. Consequently, the views of MSW have been given consideration within the empirical literature. A review of this literature is now essential to ensure that this important data is conveyed to inform and enhance national guidelines, and direct military and civilian support services.

#### **1.1.6 Aims**

The primary aim of this review is to critically evaluate empirical findings of qualitative studies that have explored the deployment experiences of military MSW.

The review addresses the following questions:

- How do MSW experience the process of deployment?
- How do MSW cope with their deployment experiences?

## 1.2 Method

### 1.2.1 Searches

#### 1.2.1.1 Database search

A systematic literature search was conducted between January 2016 and January 2017. The following electronic databases were searched: PsychINFO, Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS), Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), PsychARTICLES, Web of Science and MEDLINE. Alerts were arranged on all databases. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles using the terms outlined in table 1. These terms were comparable to those used in a recent review of quantitative military literature (DeBurgh, White, Fear & Iverson 2011), but the present review limited articles to those using qualitative methodologies. No date limit was included in the search allowing for identification of potential changes in attitudes toward women and their social role.

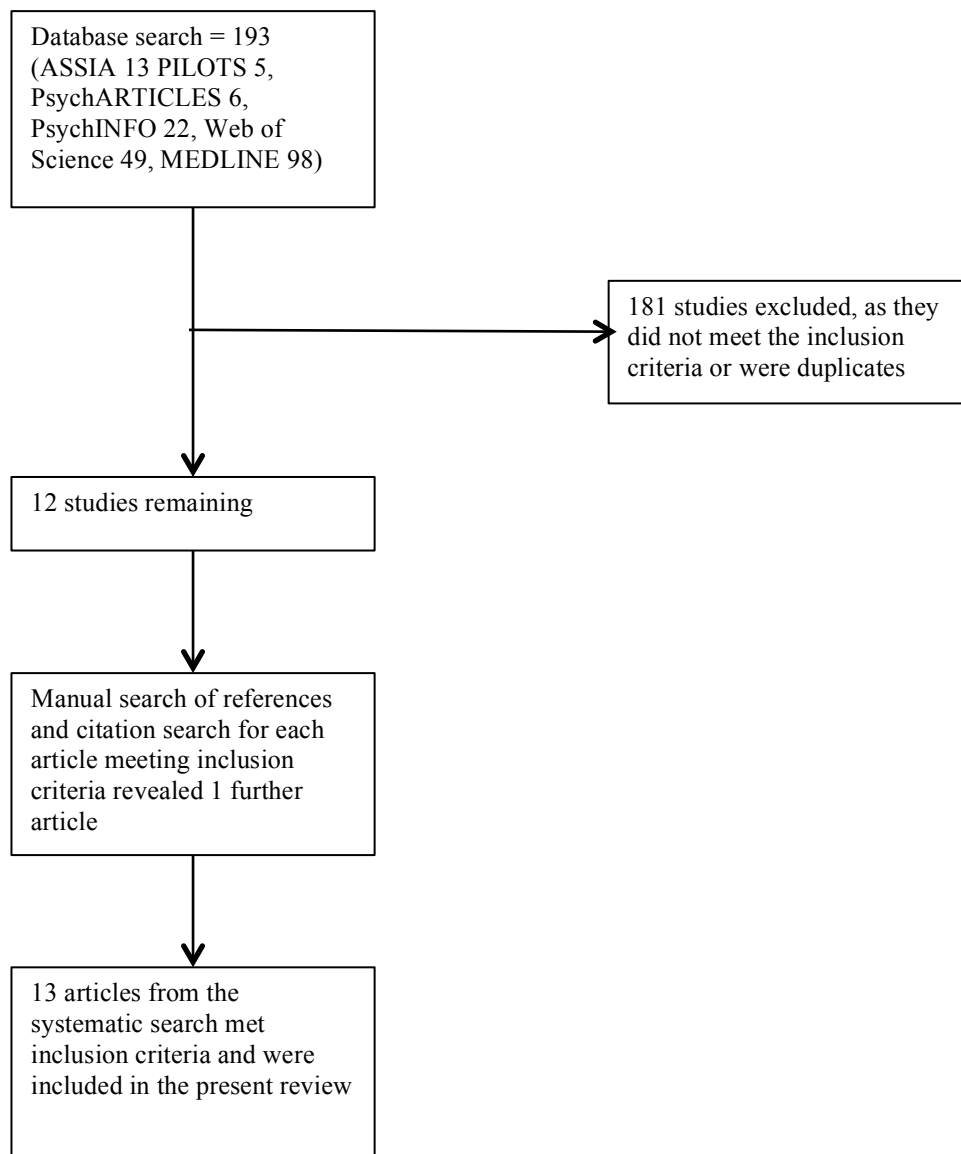
*Table 1.1 Search terms and alternatives used for systematic review*

| Search term | Alternatives   |
|-------------|--|
| Military    | Combat; Armed forces; Defence forces; Army; Navy; Naval; Royal Air Force; Veteran; Soldier; Marine |
| Women       | Woman; Female; Women; servicewomen; Gender   |
| Deployment  | Deploy*; Operation; Tour; Theatre; Active service  |
| Qualitative | Grounded Theory; Phenomenological; Narrative; Ethnographic; IPA.                                   |

Searching for qualitative studies can be challenging due to imprecise titles and vague abstracts (Robson, 2002). Consequently, for the systematic review, a broad focus was taken. Titles and abstracts of references were assessed for relevance, however studies were only excluded when the sample under investigation was not MSW, or if data were not defined clearly by gender. The remaining references were evaluated against the inclusion/exclusion criteria in Table 1.2.

### 1.2.1.2 Preliminary Search Results

*Figure 1.1 Graphic representation of search strategy*



### 1.2.1.3 Manual Search

Following the full database search, manual searches for additional references were conducted. The reference lists and citations of each article were checked for relevant studies. The titles and abstracts were then screened for eligibility in line with the inclusion/exclusion criteria (Table 1.2).

### 1.2.2 Selection Criteria

*Table 1.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic review of the literature*

| Inclusion Criteria  | Exclusion Criteria  |
|---|---|
| Articles where at least one of the primary aims was to explore military deployment. | Quantitative methodology with no qualitative data.                            |
| Qualitative methodology   | Personal accounts of deployment with no systematic analysis e.g. case studies |
| Participants included currently serving and retired MSW                             | Articles where data is not defined by gender                                  |
| Articles written in English   | Articles that were not peer reviewed  |
| Peer reviewed   |   |



### 1.2.3 Quality Framework Assessment (QFA)

Table 1.3: Characteristics of reviewed articles

| Reference/ QFA  | Aims   | Sample Size,<br>Recruitment strategy  | Participant details:   | Data collection and<br>analysis method   | Summary of Key findings  |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| 1. Burns, <i>et al.</i> , (2014).<br>Military sexual trauma<br>among US MSW during<br>deployment: A qualitative<br>study. <i>American Journal of<br/>Public Health</i> , 104(2), 345-<br>349. | To explore US MSW's<br>experiences with and<br>perceptions of Military<br>Sexual Trauma (MST). | N=22<br>Recruitment using<br>social media, classified<br>adverts, emails and<br>posting on military and<br>veteran related<br>websites and social<br>media pages. | US MSW Deployed at<br>least once since 2001<br><br>Age at deployment<br>18-24 (n=7)<br>25-29 (n=7)<br>≥ 30 (n=7)<br><br>Marital Status at<br>deployment<br>Single (n=14)<br>Married (n=5)<br>Separated or divorced<br>(n=2). | Semi-structured<br>telephone interviews.<br><br>Thematic analysis and<br>adapted Grounded<br>Theory. | 1. Factors contributing to military<br>sexual trauma during deployment:<br>Deployment Dynamics;<br>Lack of Consequences;<br>Blaming Women.<br>2. Reporting MST:<br>Negative reactions<br>Confidentiality;<br>Other barriers;<br>Unit cohesion;<br>Other facilitators.<br>3. Availability and Utilisation of<br>MST services. |
| 2. Cheney <i>et al.</i> , (2015)<br>MSW's strategies for staying<br>safe during military service,   | To explore the<br>strategies employed to<br>reduce risk of exposure                            | N= 61<br>Contact and<br>demographic   | US MSW.<br><br>National  | 14 Semi-structured focus<br>group discussions.   | Strategies for staying safe:<br>1. Relying on support networks.<br>2. Capitalising on status.  |

QFA= 12

Gender issues 32, 1-18.  
QFA = 14.

to violence by US  
MSW during  
deployment.

information provided  
by the Defence  
Manpower Data  
Centre. Letters of  
invitation mail posted  
and followed-up by  
telephone.

Guard/Reserve (n=39)  
Active or retiree  
(n=22).  
Age 23-61 (M=40).  
44% Army Reserve  
26% Army National  
Guard  
23% Air Force  
Reserve.  
68% Active Air  
Force.  
23% Active Army.  
9% Active Navy.

Thematic Analysis.

3. Masking femininity through  
clothing.

|  |  |   |  |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| 3. Conard & Scott-Tilley<br>(2015) The Lived Experience<br>of Female Veterans Deployed<br>to the Gulf War II, <i>Nursing<br/>forum</i> , 50(4), 228-240. | To explore the<br>experiences of female<br>combat veterans<br>deployed to the Gulf<br>War II:<br>1. Issues of greatest | N = 12<br>Purposive Sampling,<br>maximum variation<br>sampling, and<br>snowballing. Invitation<br>flyers at naval bases | Enlisted active-duty<br>female military<br>members deployed to<br>Gulf War II.<br>Age 19-41. | Semi-structured face-to-<br>face interviews.<br>Colaizzi's (1978)<br>descriptive<br>phenomenological | 1. Living in constant fear.<br>2. Combat has different meanings.<br>3. Bringing the war home.<br>4. Fear of being forever changed.<br>5. Disrespect from fellow military<br>members. |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|

QFA = 19.

|  |   |         |  |
|--|---|---------|--|
| concern.   | and email invitation.   | method. | 6. Physical health- for better or worse. |
| 2. Impact of combat on the life of female combat veterans.             | Navy (n=6).<br>Air Force (n=2).<br>Marines (n=2).<br>Single (n=10).<br>Married (n=2). |         | 7. Combat has rewarding experiences.     |
| 3. Perceived health impact of female veterans during their deployment. |   |         |  |

|  |   |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| 4. Doherty & Scannell-Desch (2012) Women's Health and Hygiene Experiences During Deployment to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, 2003 through 2010, <i>Journal of midwifery &amp; women's health</i> , 57(2) 172-177. | To explore US MSW's health and hygiene experiences during deployment. | N=24<br>Purposive Sampling of military nurses and subsequent Snowballing.<br>Participants recruited from a previous study. | US military nurses deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003-2010.<br>Army (n=10).<br>Air Force (n=10).<br>Navy (n=4). | Semi-structured interviews.<br>12 Face-to-face.<br>12 telephone.<br>Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method. | 1. Bathroom trips and facilities: a walk on the wild side.<br>2. Shower challenges: Lack of privacy, water problems, and location issues.<br>3. Menstruation: To suppress or not to suppress.<br>4. Staying clean: A monumental task<br>5. Various infections: Annoying distractions.<br>6. Unintended pregnancies: wartime surprises.<br>7. Safety Issues: Enemy attacks and |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|

QFA = 17.

sexual assaults.

|  |   |   |   |  |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| 5. Feldman & Hanlon (2012)<br>Count Us In: The<br>Experiences of Female War,<br>Peacemaking, and<br>Peacekeeping<br>Veterans. <i>Armed Forces and<br/>Society</i> 38(2) 205-224  | To explore how<br>deployment affects<br>female veterans and<br>their health support<br>needs.               | N=56<br>Purposive sampling in<br>collaboration with<br>veteran's associations.<br>Local and national<br>media campaigns and<br>snowballing. | Australian Defence<br>Force MSW.  | Semi-structured focus<br>group discussions.<br><br>Thematic analysis.  | 1. Rewards of deployment.<br>2. Challenges of deployment:<br>a. Separation from family.<br>b. Cultural isolation.<br>c. Lack of recognition and support.<br>3. Health and community service<br>support.            |
| QFA = 17.  |   |   |   |  |  |
| 6. Gutierrez, et al., (2013) A<br>qualitative description of<br>female veterans deployment-<br>related experiences and<br>potential suicide risk<br>factors. <i>Journal of clinical<br/>psychology</i> , 69(9), 923-935. | To explore military<br>women's deployment-<br>related experiences and<br>potential suicide risk<br>factors. | N=19<br>Purposive sampling.<br>Recruitment letters<br>mailed to MSW<br>seeking care through<br>the Veterans Health<br>Administration (VA).  | US MSW.<br><br>Age 24-52 (M=34.7).<br><br>Army (n=9).<br>Navy (n=5).<br>Air Force (n=2).<br>National Guard (n=3). | Structured, face-to-face,<br>open-ended interview.<br><br>Qualitative description<br>approach employing<br>hermeneutics. | 1. Perceived burdensomeness.<br>2. Failed belongingness.<br>3. Acquired ability for suicide<br>through habituation to pain.<br>4. Spontaneous mention of suicide.<br>5. Loss of identity, self-worth and<br>grief. |
| QFA = 17.  |   |   |   |  |  |
| 7. Kelly, et al., (2014). A<br>gendered perspective on   | To explore the<br>experiences of military   | N=42<br>Flyers posted at  | US National Guard<br>MSW  | Semi-structured face-to-<br>face interviews  | 1. General Environmental Stress<br>2. Heterogeneous job  |

|   |   |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| military deployment. <i>Women &amp; Health</i> , 54(1), 61-76.  | deployment for women in the National Guard                            | National Guard units and announcements via social media.  | Age 23-58 (M=35)   | Consensual Qualitative Research methodology (Hill, 2011).      | responsibilities.<br>3. Home comes with you.<br>4. Gendered Stress.  |
| QFA = 16.   |   | Snowballing sampling.   |  |  |  |
| 8. Mankowski <i>et al.</i> , (2015)<br>Social support throughout the deployment cycle for MSW returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. <i>Social work in Healthcare</i> , 54, 287-306 | To explore the social support of MSW throughout the deployment cycle. | N=18<br>Convenience sampling<br>Nested within the MSW Cohort Study utilising the OIF and OEF roster. Potential participants were then invited via flyers and email. | US MSW deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as part of OIF and OEF.<br>Age 27-63 (M=40.7). | Semi-structured, face-to-face interview.<br>Thematic analysis. | 1. Reliance on internal and external support whilst deployed.<br>2. Readjustment struggles and access to social support post-deployment. |
| QFA = 12.   |   |   | Army national Guard/Reserve (n=13).  |  |  |
|   |   |   | Regular Army, Navy, Air Force (n=5).   |  |  |
| 9. Manski, <i>et al.</i> , (2014)<br>Reproductive Health Access Among Deployed U.S.   | To explore MSWs' experiences of reproductive healthcare               | N=22<br>Recruited via social media and classified   | US MSW.<br>Age at deployment   | In-depth open-ended interviews.                                | 1. Facilitators and barriers to healthcare.<br>a. Chain of command and   |

|   |                    |   |   |                    |  |
|---|--------------------|---|---|--------------------|--|
| MSW: A Qualitative Study, <i>Military medicine</i> , 179(6), 645-652. | during deployment. | advertisement, email invitation and postings on military related websites and social media. | 18-24 (n=7).<br>25-29 (n=7).<br>30+ (n=7).<br><br>Army (n=12).<br>Navy (n=4).<br>National Guard (n=4).<br>Marine (n=2). | Thematic analysis. | confidentiality.<br>b. Female providers.<br>c. Healthcare seeking stigma.<br>d. Logistics.<br>e. Lack of orientation.<br>f. Resources.<br>g. Base size.<br>2. Contraceptive use.<br>3. Contraceptive counselling.<br>4. Contraceptive access.<br>5. Pregnancy tests.<br>6. Experiences of perceptions of pregnancy.<br>7. Impact of pregnancy. |
| QFA = 12.   |                    |   |   |                    |  |

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|  |   |   |  |  |   |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| 10. Mattocks, <i>et al.</i> , (2012)<br>Women at war:<br>Understanding how women<br>veterans cope with combat<br>and military sexual trauma.<br><i>Social Science and Medicine</i> ,<br>74, 537-545. | To explore MSWs' deployment experiences.  | N=19<br>Part of an OEF/OIF cohort study. Sample invited from the OEF/OIF Roster of veterans enrolling in Veterans Health Administration (VA). | US MSW.<br><br>Age 23-55 (M=37).<br>National Guard = 50%.<br>Army/Navy Res. = 40%. | Semi-structured interview.<br><br>Thematic analysis.             | 1. Stressful Military experiences:<br>a. Combat related stress.<br>b. Sexual trauma.<br><br>2. Separation from family.<br><br>3. Post-deployment reintegration problems<br>a. Leaving the war behind.<br>b. Disrupted relationships with family and friends.<br>4. Coping strategies.<br>a. Behavioural avoidance.<br>b. Cognitive avoidance.<br>c. Behavioural approach. |
| 11. Nilsson, <i>et al.</i> , (2015)<br>Women in the National Guard: Experiences with children during deployment. <i>Counselling Psychology Quarterly</i> , 28(2), 113-131.                           | To explore the deployment experiences of women with children in the National Guard. | N=30<br>Purposive sampling of participants of a larger study.   | US National Guard MSW.<br><br>Age 23-50 (M=39).                                    | Semi-structured face-to-face interview.<br><br>Content analysis. | 1. Concerns for children's well-being.<br>2. Sense of Loss.<br>3. Reintegration: Personal challenges.<br>4. Reintegration: Children's reactions.  |

QFA = 13.

QFA = 14.

|  |   |   |   |  |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| 12. Trego, L.L. (2007)<br>Military Women's Menstrual Experiences and Interest in Menstrual Suppression During Deployment. <i>Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing</i> . 36, (4), 342-347. | To explore military women's menstrual experiences and awareness of menstrual suppression during deployment. | N=9<br><br>Recruitment through routine deployment medical processing. | US Army MSW.<br><br>Age 20-46 (M=27.8).<br><br>Active duty (n=5).<br>Reservist (n=4.) | Semi-structured interviews.<br><br>Content analysis. | 1. Menses intensified during deployment.<br>2. It's hard to take care of yourself during your period.<br>3. Menstrual challenges.<br>4. Menstruation is an inconvenience.<br>5. Dealing with menses in the military world: "we're in the minority".<br>6. Negative aspects of menstruation outweigh the positive during deployment.<br>7. Menstrual suppression. |
|--|---|---|---|--|--|

QFA = 18.

|  |   |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| 13. Weitz, R., (2015).<br>Vulnerable warriors: Military women, military culture, and fear of rape. <i>Gender issues</i> , 32, 164-183. | To explore how MSW's' experiences of deployment challenge and reinforce cultural discourse about women's vulnerability. | N=25.<br><br>Announcements posted on electronic bulletin boards and email listserve of military | US MSW.<br><br>Age:<br>27-29 (n=9).<br>30-34 (n=8).<br>35-39 (n=4). | 22 Semi-structured face-to-face interviews.<br><br>3 Semi-structured telephone interview. | 1. Reinforcing rape fears.<br>a. Reinforcing women's physical vulnerability.<br>b. Frequent harassment.<br>c. Assaults/near assaults.<br>d. Lack of supportive comrades. |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|



QFA = 10.

and veteran groups.

40-44 (n=4).

Army (n=7).

Army Res./NG (n=8).

Air Force (n=4).

Air Force Res/NG  
(n=2).

Navy (n=0).

Navy Reserve (n=1).  
Marines (n=3).

e. Reinforcing the ubiquity of male sexual predators.

f. Reinforcing men's protector status.

g. Reinforcing women's responsibility for rape.

2. Challenging rape fears.

a. Challenging women's physical vulnerability.

b. Challenging the ubiquity of male sexual predators.

c. Positioning women as protectors.

d. Challenging women's responsibility for rape.

Kmet, Lee and Cook (2004) provide a quality assessment framework specifically for quality analysis of qualitative studies (Appendix B). This framework has also been used in recent reviews in similar subject areas (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung & Skirton, 2012). Studies are scored from 0-20, with the existence of quality indicators gaining a higher score. This quality framework assessment was applied to all articles meeting the inclusion criteria. The results are included in Table 1.3.

The suitability of quality rating systems for qualitative reviews has been disputed. These frameworks have conventionally been developed upon quantitative principles and evaluations of quality (Hammersley, 2007; Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, 2008; Mays & Pope, 2000). Conversely, rather than to promote the exclusion of studies, as would be the case for quantitative quality assessments, the quality assessment framework for the systematic review will be used to identify the strengths and limitations of articles.

#### **1.2.3.1 QFA Results**

Inter-rater reliability tests were carried out on five papers included in the systematic review. The Kappa reliability coefficient for each paper is included in table 1.4. It can be seen that no coefficient score was below  $k=0.6$  with an overall reliability of  $k=0.83$ . According to Altman (1999) this represents a consistently strong pattern of inter-rater reliability.

Table 1.4 Kappa reliability coefficients

| Author/date                    | Kappa coefficient ( <i>k</i> ) | Probability ( <i>p</i> ) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Feldman & Hanlon (2012)        | 1.0                            | .000                     |
| Kelly <i>et al.</i> (2014)     | .78                            | .011                     |
| Mankowski <i>et al.</i> (2015) | .83                            | .001                     |
| Nilsson <i>et al.</i> (2015)   | .62                            | .016                     |
| Weitz (2015)                   | .84                            | .000                     |
| <b>Overall <i>k</i></b>        | .83                            | .001                     |

Studies included in the QFA scored between 10 and 19 ( $M=15$ ). Of the reviewed articles, 54% ( $n = 7$ ) clearly reported the aims and objectives of the research (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Gutierrez, *et al.*, 2013; Mattocks, *et al.*, 2012; Nilsson, *et al.*, 2015; Trego, 2007), the remaining articles only vaguely reported aims. 30% ( $n = 4$ ) of the reviewed articles clearly identified the design of their research (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014, Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Trego, 2007). All articles were identified as qualitative, but no further epistemological information was reported. 39% ( $n = 5$ ) clearly described and justified their sampling strategy (Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Doherty *et al.* 2012; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Weitz, 2015). The remainder relied on convenience sampling, or the description of sampling strategy was simply too imprecise to replicate.

46% ( $n = 6$ ) of the reviewed articles clearly described systematic data collection methods that allowed for replication (Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012, Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Kelly *et al.*, 2014, Trego, 2007). 38% ( $n = 5$ ) reported the exclusive use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews as their means of data collection (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013;

Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015); 16% ( $n = 2$ ) reported the use of focus groups (Cheney *et al.*, 2014, Feldman & Hanlon, 2012); 23% ( $n = 3$ ) reported the exclusive use of telephone interviews (Burns *et al.*, 2014, Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Manski *et al.*, 2014); and 16% ( $n = 2$ ) reported the used of both telephone and face-to-face interviews. 46% ( $n = 6$ ) of the reviewed articles clearly reported systematic data analysis procedures allowing for replication of data (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Feldman & Hanlon 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Trego, 2007). 32% ( $n = 4$ ) reported grounded theory (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Weitz, 2015); 38% ( $n = 5$ ) thematic analysis (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014, Doherty *et al.*, 2012, Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012); 16% ( $n = 2$ ) content analysis (Nilsson *et al.*, 2015; Trego, 2007); 8% ( $n = 1$ ) consensual qualitative research methodology (Kelly *et al.*, 2014); and 8% ( $n = 1$ ) (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013), did not report data analysis procedure. Those reporting grounded theory stated that procedures were ‘modified’; yet further details were not included. In addition, none of the articles reporting grounded theory generated a model.

16% ( $n = 4$ ) of the reviewed articles reported the use of more than one verification procedure (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014, Doherty *et al.*, 2012, Feldman & Hanlon 2012, Kelly *et al.*, 2014). The remaining articles, with the exception of Weitz (2015) who reported no verification procedures, detailed procedures for inter-coder consistency but did not seek to validate themes with MSW. Of the reviewed articles, 16% ( $n = 4$ ) reported the reflexive and epistemological position of the researcher, but only 8% ( $n = 2$ ) detailed their procedures for managing their own impact on the data. The remaining articles made no statement regarding reflexivity. Hermeneutics

argues that the position of the researcher throughout the process of data collection and analysis can influence the findings. It is therefore desirable for researchers to express the relationship to the topic under investigation, its potential influence and their processes for mitigation.

The experiences of 363 MSW are included in the current review of the literature, ranging from 19 to 63 years of age. The reporting of demographic data varied widely. 54% (n = 7) of articles reported race/ethnicity data (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Trego, 2007; Weitz, 2015); 85% (n = 11) reported military branch (excl. Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015); 69% (n = 9) reported the number of deployments (excl. Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012, Trego, 2007; Weitz, 2015); 54% (n = 7) reported military rank (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Trego, 2007; Weitz, 2015); 62% (n = 8) reported marital status (excl. Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Weitz, 2015); and 39% (n = 5) reported educational attainment (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012).

Of the reported race/ethnicity data, (n = 171), 78% identified as white Caucasian. Of the reported education data (n = 136), 23% of MSW were high-school educated, 18% college educated and 59% had tertiary level education of Bachelors degree or above. Of the reported marital status data (n = 197), 46% of MSW were married, 39% single and 15% separated or divorced. Of the reported military branch data (n = 277), 47% of MSW were reserves or National Guard and 53% active duty. Two

articles focused solely on experiences of MSW from the National Guard. None of the remaining articles defined participants by military branch. Of the reported rank data ( $n = 162$ ), 40% were officers and for the reported deployment data ( $n = 239$ ), 67% deployed once, 29% twice and 4% three or more times.

The QFA highlights the varying quality of qualitative data reporting. Articles frequently fail to adequately describe data collection and data analysis methods. In addition, verification procedures were consistently limited with few ( $n = 4$ ) articles validating their themes with MSW. Furthermore, it was highlighted that very few articles clearly state the epistemological and reflexive position of the researcher, whilst also reflecting on and managing their impact on the data. The exclusion of demographic data also limits the degree to which MSWs' experiences can be understood within a broader context.

#### **1.2.4 Analysis**

Some post-modernists argue that the systematic review and synthesis of qualitative findings is philosophically incompatible (Sandelowski, Docherty & Emden, 1997; Campbell, Pound, Pope & Britten *et al.*, 2003). As findings are context specific, generalisability cannot be assumed. However, the present review is based on the assertion that meaning is co-constructed through shared perceptions, whilst acknowledging the need to be mindful of the specificity of context when drawing conclusions.

Consequently, the proposed review followed the procedures outlined in previous research (Britten, Campbell, Pope & Donovan *et al.*, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 2003;

Emslie, 2005). Firstly, the context and main concepts from each study were identified. Secondly, the findings between articles were systematically compared to identify reoccurring themes. Thirdly, the parallels and disparities between findings were explored. Lastly, to ensure the findings reflected the voices of MSW, the present review used excerpts from the data to illustrate context, and ensure that the review represents MSWs' experiences.

### **1.3 Results**

The common themes contained in all of the articles reviewed are presented within the aims of the literature review. The first aim was to elicit the most common themes relating to MSW's experiences of deployment. The second was to extract themes relating to how MSW cope with their deployment experiences.

#### **1.3.1 Aim 1: What are the deployment experiences of MSW?**

##### **1.3.1.1 "*Woman in a man's world*"**

Ten of the thirteen reviewed articles reported MSWs' experiences of gender discrimination during deployment reinforced by a patriarchal and bullying military culture. (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013, Kelly *et al.*, 2013; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Weitz, 2015). MSW's experiences of this culture ranged from perceptions of weakness and vulnerability, to sexual objectification, assaults and rape.

The majority of MSW reported that women were generally looked down upon in the military as a “woman in a man’s world” (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013, p.930), and believed to be ‘different’ and inferior to their male colleagues physically and psychologically. The low ratio of women to men, and men generally outranking women maintained a gender binary, with men perceived to be superior (Burns *et al.*, 2014) and MSW ‘weak’ (Manski *et al.*, 2014, p.648). The experiences of ‘widespread sexism’ elicited a sense of failed belonging for many MSW, who felt that they were not accepted as equal by their male colleagues or by the institutional hierarchy. The prevailing cultural perception of femininity representing weakness and incompetence left MSW fearful of being a ‘burden’ and not living up to ‘masculine’ standards. It also limited the opportunities that MSW had whilst deployed, unable to ‘prove themselves’ and in need of protection from male colleagues, as the following account highlights:

“I was not allowed to leave the FOB [Forward Operating Base]. I even went up as far as the brigade, requesting to go on a mission and was turned down... the discrimination... it’s there.”

(Kelly *et al.*, 2013, p70).

Some MSW reported that they developed a deep trust for their male comrades and officers, who accepted them as ‘honorary members’ of a ‘band of brothers’ (Weitz, 2015, p.175). Yet having the support of another women whilst on deployment could make a significant difference to MSWs’ experiences, helping to protect and empower them. Those who shared their deployment with other MSW commented on how:



“It was actually a huge breath of fresh air whenever I got to see the other two females...It’s kinda like whatever happened that wasn’t going so well...just kind of went away because we got to sit down and have girl time”

(Mankowski *et al.*, 2015, p. 295).

Conversely, the emotional impact of being an isolated minority was captured by one MSW, who spoke of her “tears” at meeting the “first woman she had seen in months” (Feldman & Hanlon, 2012, p.215).

#### *1.3.1.2 Military Sexual Trauma (MST): “A legit threat”:*

Denigration and sexual objectification of women frequently co-occur in hyper-masculine contexts, and are correlated with higher frequency of sexual harassment and assault (Vaes, Paladino & Puvia, 2011). MST is defined as sexual coercion, sexual harassment, sexually threatening behaviour or sexual assault (including rape) that is experienced whilst serving in the military (Mankowski, & Everett, 2016). MST represented a key finding in the reviewed articles. Seven of the thirteen articles reported experiences of MST, most consistently referring to sexual harassment (Burns *et al.*, 2014, Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Kelly, *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Weitz, 2015). Three of those articles included experiences of sexual assault including rape (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Weitz, 2015, Mattocks *et al.*, 2012). The harassment experienced by MSW was often explicit, crude and lurid, as one servicewoman captured in the following quote:

“I got tired of disgusting men talking about my vagina... telling me that they wanted me to give them oral sex”

(Weitz, 2015, p.169).

MSW also reported being stared at and followed, or being walked in on by male soldiers in the female shower block. Moreover, these were not isolated incidents, with MSW reporting that they were “literally sexually harassed every single day” (Kelly, *et al.*, 2014, p.70).

Importantly, MSW need not have experienced MST themselves to be affected by the risk of sexual assault. Five articles reported that MSW who did not have direct experience of MST, did experience significant “fear” of sexual assault during their deployments (Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Weitz, 2015). MSW reported hearing “horrific stories about sexual assault” (Doherty *et al.*, 2012, p.175) prior to and during their deployment, serving to increase their sense of vulnerability and fear. Superior officers could also underscore women’s vulnerability to assault by their use of prevention measures, as one servicewoman illustrates:

“The battlespace commander called the three women on the base into his office and he told us that we were the only ones on the base who were allowed to chamber a round because he wasn’t going to have a rape on his watch”

(Weitz, 2015, p.169).

Many MSW talked about how they were expected to rely on same gender ‘battle buddies’ in order to prevent sexual assault. Yet due to the ratio of men to women, they often found themselves “ordered to have a man” (Weitz, 2015, p.172) as a battle buddy to protect them. This not only reinforced the idea of MSW being vulnerable and requiring the protection of a man, but also their responsibility for the prevention of assault.

Where MSW required support for MST, concerns about confidentiality were common, with close quarter living conditions and low numbers of women meaning “everybody knows everybody’s business” (Manski *et al*, 2014, p.248) and compromising anonymity. This was starkly evident one MSW’s report that even filing a theoretically confidential restricted report, she could be easily identified:

“If there’s 1 female or 2 females in the unit and it comes down to that ‘there’s 1 female raped or sexually assaulted in this unit’... Hmmm, not too hard to figure out”

(Burns *et al.*, 2014, p. 347)

In some situations individuals in the unit contributed to an environment supportive of reporting MST, in other cases however, pressure to maintain unit cohesion was thought to discourage MSW from reporting:

“When you’re in a team environment, you report something bad that happened to you, you’re the one responsible for breaking up the team”

(Burns *et al.*, 2014, p.347).

For some, this was exacerbated by the chain of command whom MSW felt were generally unsupportive, as one account describes: “they just turn a blind eye to it...and they pretend it didn’t happen” (Burns, *et al.*, 2014, p.346). Moreover, superiors were in some cases complicit, as is illustrated by the following statement from an enlisted MSW:

“There was an officer and an enlisted man who would openly sexually harass me in front of everybody”

(Weitz, 2015, p.171)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, MSW feared negative reactions from peers and superiors if they reported MST, including disbelief and blame. MSW of higher rank also experienced a culture supporting MST, creating a barrier to social support, as illustrated by the following account of a lieutenant colonel:

“My rank, its very hard to find a social network. If I would have a male companion, it was looked upon that we were having an affair. If I had any female that I hung out with all the time, it was – I was showing favouritism or I was...sleeping with her”

(Mankowski *et al.*, 2015, p.296).

#### *1.3.1.3 Dangerous and dirty: a hazardous working environment*

Five of the thirteen articles reported experiences of deployment where women themselves or others were under threat of death or of serious injury. The majority of MSW were working, eating and sleeping in an environment where they were in constant physical danger, as one servicewoman poignantly expresses:

“Imagine feeling the most scared you have ever felt, and then feeling that fear constantly...”

(Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013, p.931).

MSW reported that their lives were threatened most days leaving them feeling “vulnerable and frightened” (Doherty *et al.*, 2012, p.175), “always on alert, always on edge, just waiting” (Kelly *et al.*, 2014, p.67). Whilst inside their military compounds, they experienced mortar and rocket propelled grenade attacks and supported comrades who had severe combat related injuries. Some had roles that would take them ‘outside the wire’ into unsecured areas. Here they reported experiencing greater ‘anxiety’ with the anticipation of roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices, leading them to question whether “today was the day you’d get blown up” (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014, p.234; Doherty *et al.*, 2012). MSW also witnessed “horrific” combat-related violence and injuries. As one servicewoman captures: “[we] saw the worst that could be done to a human being by another human being” (Mattocks, *et al.*, 2012 p.540).

In addition to persistent threat to life and serious injury, three articles reported that MSW faced unique stressors related to managing their health and hygiene needs. The

data suggested that maintaining a general level of personal hygiene and more specific feminine health care needs could become ‘a monumental task.’ Often working in high temperatures for long hours and in dirty, sandy conditions, MSW found maintaining an acceptable level of personal hygiene incredibly difficult, as one account illustrates:

“I went weeks on end without anything that resembled a real shower ... we would be constantly sweating, dripping wet. We felt dirty and disgusting”

(Doherty, *et al.*, 2012 p.174)

MSW reported ‘anger’ and ‘disgust’ at having to deal with ‘substandard’ and poorly located bathroom and shower facilities. As a result, MSW were at risk of infection, and endured long periods of discomfort. One MSW described bathroom conditions in graphic detail:

“...you had to use a port-a-potty...people missed the hole a lot, so there was urine sprayed all over in there, not to mention the bugs, and sometimes exposed feces. It was gross; absolutely disgusting”

(Doherty, *et al.*, 2012 p.173).

A primary concern unique to deployed MSW, were experiences with menstruation. MSW reported that menses were irregular and heavy during deployment, with symptoms including cramps, odor, emotional lability, fatigue and pelvic fullness being intensified by the heat and stress of deployment environments. The combination of wearing a lot of military gear, heat, dirt, sweat and lack of sanitary

conditions meant that women experienced great ‘inconvenience’ in trying to stay clean with “no private place to deal with your period” (Doherty *et al.*, 2012, p.174). They reported problems with using menstrual products due to the harsh environment, and feeling ‘embarrassed’ about having to ask explicit permission to arrange their feminine healthcare needs:

“I can’t say that even as an officer I’m gonna approach my CO and be like, ‘hey sir, I’m having this female issue...if you say, ‘It’s a woman’s issue,’ they [the chain of command] would just be like ‘I don’t wanna hear it, go!’”

(Manski *et al.*, 2014, p.647).

#### 1.3.1.4 “Home comes with you”

Four articles reported MSW experiences of communication with home during deployment (Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015). During deployment, MSW were separated from friends, parents, partners and children by large distances and for long periods of time. MSW reported that their connection with home served as a source of practical and emotional support, as well as a source of distress. Family, friends and coworkers would send letters and care packages to MSW, which they ‘relied on’ as a source of “coping and connection” (Mankowski *et al.*, 2015 p.294). Experiences with the communication systems varied with less than optimal infrastructure, operational constraints and role requirements meaning that opportunities to call home could often be ‘rare’. These factors were a source of distress for many deployed MSW, as one account illustrates:

“Every chance I had to get on the phone...I would just wait in the longest line ever”

(Mankowski *et al.*, 2015 p.295).

Yet communication with home was not always positive. MSW reported experiences of worry relating to partners, children and parents at home and concern that issues could only be minimally addressed from afar (Kelly *et al.*, 2014). Many reported feelings of ‘helplessness’ and ‘guilt’ for not being available to their families. Some felt ‘burdened’ by the expectation to remain in the caregiver role, whilst some also experienced a sense of ‘loss’ at not being a part of significant and special events, and felt unable to bond with their children from afar. After all, one MSW reflects: “a year changes a child so much” (Kelly *et al.*, 2014, p.69; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015, p.120-121).

#### *1.3.1.5 Post-deployment reintegration: “a solitary journey”*

The ‘unique’ physical and emotional challenges of deployment perhaps separated MSW from other professional women (Feldman & Hanlon, 2012, p.215). Many of the experiences outlined above left MSW feeling ‘permanently changed’ by their deployment experiences (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014, p.235), with reintegration proving a “difficult and often solitary journey” (Mankowski *et al.*, 2015, p.296).

Due to combat-related experiences, many MSW reported symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression on their return home. They were often unprepared for the emotional distress attributed to the ‘lingering effects of war’, which left them feeling ‘damaged’ and confused (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Mankowski, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012; Nilsson *et al.*, 2014).



Four studies reported that whilst MSW may return to a familiar community, the people who can really understand are those who have shared similar experiences. In this regard MSW frequently experienced feelings of not belonging in the civilian world. This perceived lack of understanding from their families and friends, left MSW feeling ‘isolated from others’ exacerbated by the loss of shared experiences during their time away. The resulting disruption to interpersonal relationships added further experiences of failure, hopelessness and anger (Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Gutierrez, *et al.*, 2013; Mankowski *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks, *et al.*, 2012).

In addition to a sense of loss within the family, many MSW experienced a ‘Lack of recognition’ and resistance from within the military community to acknowledging the legitimacy of their military service, with the potential to affect long-term health and wellbeing (Feldman & Hanlon, 2012, p.216). MSW experienced a loss of professional role and personal and professional identity upon their return from deployment. Lack of recognition and disrespect from the military community served to ‘downgrade the value’ of their operational service, and diminished their experiences of pride and contribution (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Feldman & Hanlon, 2015; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013). These experiences led to mixed emotions including grief, shame and anger, with the potential to leave returning MSW feeling ‘alone and empty’ (Mankowski *et al.*, 2014). For many proud MSW, the welcome home, which might otherwise have provided validation for their service, was non-existent.

Many MSW reported that health and community support services had a ‘Lack of understanding’ about the effects of deployment on women’s health. In addition,

MSW felt that they had a poor understanding of the civilian health care system and did not perceive the value in informing ‘unappreciative’ medical and health practitioners about their military service histories MSW explained that they just “didn’t have any idea how they could help” (Feldman & Hanlon, 2012, p.217).

The majority expressed serious difficulties with adjusting back to civilian life, reconnecting and renegotiating relationships, taking on civilian responsibilities whilst simultaneously “longing for the space to internally process what they had experienced” on deployment, and to answer “unanswered questions” (Mankowski *et al.*, 2015, p.298). Many reported the lack of understanding from family and community, and being unprepared for their intense emotional reactions. Some reported anger, frustration, and being overwhelmed by the demands of civilian life.

### **1.3.2 Aim 2: How do MSW cope with their deployment experiences?**

#### *1.3.2.1 “Masking femininity”*

Six of the reviewed articles reported findings that MSW cope with their deployment experiences by hiding their femininity in order to ‘blend-in’ (Cheney *et al.*, 2015; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Trego, 2007; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Weitz, 2015). At one level this involved using uniform and clothing to serve as protection from risk of MST by minimizing unwanted attention, as one account illustrates:

“I wear huge T-shirts... I don’t wear things that are skin-tight. The crotch of my BDUs [Battle Dress Uniform] almost hangs down to my knees... its not showing anything off to where it’s bringing it [sexual assault] on”

(Cheney *et al.*, 2015, p.12)

They believed that civilian and tight fitting clothing heightened their vulnerability to MST. MSW also reported being very aware of what they said, not wanting to “participate in conversations that could have gone down a sexual path” (Weitz, 2015, p.173).

Unlike their male colleagues, MSW faced a difficult decision regarding feminine care during deployment. Intensified menstrual experiences led many MSW to seek menstrual suppression through medication, either using the contraceptive pill, or depot injection. For those who were not aware of this option, or decided against suppression, they reported using extra-absorbent products and delaying changing those products in order to cope with the lack of privacy and facilities for feminine hygiene (Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Manski *et al.*, 2014; Trego, 2007).

#### 1.3.2.2 “Suck it up”

All thirteen of the reviewed articles reported themes related to avoidance and emotional suppression as a means of coping with deployment. MSW reported coping by keeping their experiences and emotions to themselves both during and post-deployment (Burns *et al.*, 2014; Feldman & Hanlon, 2012; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015; Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Manski *et al.*, 2014). This included experiences of MST,

where concerns regarding confidentiality, stigma, blame and career impact led some to wait until they returned home to report MST. As one account captures:

“Some things in the military records are career enders... it doesn’t matter what it’s for, they see that you’ve been in there for mental health and they’ll re-evaluate you – are you really stable enough to be a soldier?”

(Burns *et al.*, 2014, p.347)

However, perceived lack of appropriate support encouraged many MSW to stay silent.

In addition, many MSW reported having to just ‘get on with it’ during deployment, as ‘the mission comes first.’ (Conard & Scott-Tilley, 2014; Cheney *et al.*, 2014; Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012). MSW reported the need to hold off emptying our bladders, and foregoing health care needs to avoid visiting the facilities, particularly at night. Another had resorted to ‘peeing in a bottle’ in her trailer in the middle of the night so she wouldn’t have to walk to the bathroom in the dark.

To overcome the lack of facilities, MSW had developed ways to preserve their privacy and dignity whilst maintaining a certain level of hygiene in difficult conditions. For example, one MSW reported becoming ‘queen of the poncho shower.’ In general, MSW reported that they stay focused on the job at hand, as one MSW aptly captured: “you do what you’ gotta do.” (Manski *et al.*, 2014)

Keeping their experiences private continued into MSWs' return home post-deployment. Readjustment required a period of time where MSW 'didn't want to talk.' MSW reported intentionally withdrawing (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Nilsson *et al.*, 2015), avoiding military support and rather than trying to connect with friends and family members or share their experiences with other veterans, MSW instead chose to remove themselves from others. As one account captures:

“I isolate myself in the bedroom, I read my books” and “now I don't care because I just want to be alone.”

(Mattocks *et al.*, 2015, p.542-543)

Nevertheless, many MSW recognised the importance of reaching out to others to help, speaking of the therapeutic importance of coming together with other women and veterans to share their experiences.

Four of the reviewed articles reported that MSW engaged in various behavioural patterns in order to cope with or avoid their deployment experiences both during and post-deployment (Doherty *et al.*, 2012; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013; Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012). MSW engaged in various forms of coping strategies, replacing stressful deployment feelings with alternative sources of satisfaction, including: binge eating and purging, compulsive overspending, over-exercising and prescription drug abuse, thrill seeking and reckless behaviour (Mankowski *et al.*, 2015; Mattocks *et al.*, 2012). Exercise, including running and yoga, for some represented a positive strategy, which helped to develop regular routines and overcome negative emotions; as one MSW put it, exercise could be “that little bit of

love is for me and only me” (Mattocks *et al.*, 2012, p.543). Yet others engaged in extreme degrees of exercise to cope with their stress, for example, one MSW reported she would “exercise to excess and really to excess to the point where I would be sick.” (Mattocks *et al.*, 2012 p. 542)

#### **1.4 Discussion**

The aim of the review was to critically appraise the qualitative empirical literature exploring the deployment experiences of MSW. The review also sought to identify MSWs’ ways of coping with their experiences. Where possible, the review highlighted differences of experience or ways of coping between reservist and regular MSW, in addition to any variation associated with rank.

A systematic review of thirteen articles elicited ten important themes organised under deployment experiences, post-deployment reintegration and coping strategies. Prominent themes during deployment included: *‘Woman in a man’s world’*; *‘MST a legit threat’*; *‘Dangerous and dirty, a hazardous working environment’*; and *‘Home comes with you’*. The prominent themes relating to coping strategies included: *‘Masking femininity’*; and *‘suck it up’*. The themes elicited from the review support previous findings regarding the high levels of sexual discrimination and exposure to sexual harassment and assault in the military.

The present findings support previous research highlighting the hegemonic masculine values endorsed by the military patriarchy, and the deleterious effects of imposing essentialist binary perceptions of gender (Burke, 1998; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Sultana, 2011; Connell, 2014). Gender is socially constructed based on cultural

attitudes toward biological sex differences, and thus often expressed as opposing characteristics. In the military hierarchical structure, there must be a dominant and a submissive; in a patriarchal culture, it is the women that must submit and are “othered”. Thus traditionally feminine characteristics are defined in opposition to masculine ones. Consequently, as supported by the current findings, women are ritualistically denigrated (Burke, 1998).

It has been argued that some men (and women) in male dominated organisations use ‘gender harassment’ in order to resist the intrusion of women into their gendered spaces (Farly, 1978; Miller, 1997). Failing to meet strict masculine expectations can be viewed by men and women as ‘weak and inferior’ (Spak & McCart, 2004; Schmid, 2010). Furthermore, Sasson-Levy argued that patriarchal assumptions that women are either “good” (wives, mothers, sweethearts) and in need of protection, or “bad” (whores, bitches, dykes) and deserving of degradation, reinforces that women only exist in relation to men as victims in need of protection or as sexual objects deserving exploitation (Burke, 1998; Sasson-Levy, 2003).

The present review supports previous findings that MSW cope with frequent denigration by mimicking masculine practices, distancing themselves from traditional femininity and keeping experiences of MST to themselves (Sasson-Levy, 2003). MSW revealed how they would mask their femininity in a variety of ways including wearing loose fitting uniforms to hide their bodies, menstrual suppression, holding off emptying their bladders and conforming to masculine norms of emotional suppression. As a result MSW undermine gender dichotomies (Connell, 1990; Snyder, 1999), whilst simultaneously complying with masculine norms.

Whilst adopting a “gender performance”, MSW do not become men, rather their behaviour suggests a new gender identity that combines both masculine and feminine elements, breaking the boundaries between masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990). However, patriarchal norms are pervasive, and thus this review argues that the MSWs’ subversive behaviours might be their only means of resistance against the military’s masculinist ideology.

The present review also adds support to previous findings that identification with military gender norms leads MSW to distance themselves from traditional feminine behaviour (Sasson-Levy, 2003). In order to differentiate themselves from what they perceive as traditional, weak and submissive femininity, participants spoke of their condescension, and disdain about MSW adopting traditional feminine attitudes and practices. In doing so they present themselves in opposition of the traditional women against whom they construct their military identity. This perhaps represents the internalisation of military ideological values, and might indicate a subconscious endorsement of patriarchal norms.

Findings from the present review shed light on how the challenging experiences of deployment are exacerbated for MSW who must also contend with extremely high levels of gendered stress. MSW must contend with a military culture that demands they rid themselves of femininity and conform to a masculine ideology. In order to survive in the harsh and violent environment of combat deployments, women must find the perfect balance of gender identity, suppressing enough femininity in order to “blend-in” and not attract any unwanted attention. The findings from the present review highlight that if MSW appear too feminine, too available, then they are



viewed as sexual objects, legitimising denigration. If they appear too masculine, then they can be labeled as “bitches” or “dykes” (Sasson-Levy, 2003), legitimising denigration. Acceptance and belonging seem therefore, to some extent be contingent on conforming to strict gender identity rules.

#### **1.4.1 Limitations**

Studies included in the QFA scored between 10 and 19 ( $M=15$ ). 54% ( $n = 7$ ) of articles failed to achieve the upper QFA threshold of 0.75, and one article failed to achieve the lower QFA threshold of 0.55. With so few articles producing data of good quality, conclusions from the current review need to be interpreted with caution. The QFA suggests the need for greater standardisation of qualitative data reporting. Of particular concern is the replicability of procedures. Just 39% ( $n = 5$ ) clearly described and justified their sampling strategy, 46% ( $n = 6$ ) adequately described systematic data collection methods, and 46% ( $n = 6$ ) effectively reported systematic data analysis procedures. For the sampling strategies reported, many relied on convenience sampling or on purposive sampling of VA attendees. This limited participants to a small predominantly white non-representative sample, restricting conceptual generalisation.

Data collection procedures also varied. There are inherent limitations in the use of telephone interviews and focus groups. It could be argued that telephone interviews lose valuable non-verbal expression. Paired with the fact that some interviews were reported to be as short as fifteen minutes long, it is questionable whether these interviews could have elicited data of sufficient richness and depth. Furthermore, whilst focus groups elicit important information about the social construction of a

phenomenon, it is possible that some of the personal meaning for individuals was lost due to the implicit social pressure to conform.

31% ( $n = 4$ ) of the reviewed articles reported the use of more than one verification procedure. With the exception of Weitz (2015) who reported no verification procedures, the remaining articles detailed procedures for inter-coder consistency but did not seek to validate themes with MSW themselves. Where such personal experiences and meanings are shared by participants, it could be argued that it is not just a question of methodological rigor to validate themes with the MSW themselves, but ethically essential. Verification by inter-coder consistency, in addition to independent verification and participant verification ought to be considered a minimum standard when dealing with data analysis subject to such vulnerability to researcher bias. Further to this point, of the reviewed articles, just 8% ( $n = 2$ ) reported the reflexive and epistemological position of the researcher and detailed their procedures for managing their own influences on the data. Failure to acknowledge and manage the researcher's epistemological and reflexive position, in addition to methodological limitations and poor verification procedures, raises questions about the usefulness of the findings.

The reporting of demographic data varied widely. Research has shown that the youngest, high school educated, black and minority ethnic, lower ranking, single women between the ages of 18-24 are at the highest risk of MST (Cheney *et al.*, 2015). With those groups being underrepresented in the reviewed literature, it is possible that experiences, coping strategies and perceptions of support could be skewed. In addition, some of the data reported for MST were based on MSW who

had not experienced nor witnessed MST themselves (*e.g.* Burns *et al.*, 2014). The sampling strategies employed led to a heterogeneous sample, with a lack of definition by demographic information; military arm, rank and reservist/National Guard status. With MSW working in diverse operational roles and deploying to a variety of locations with different facilities available, the use of homogeneous sampling may extrapolate further experiential nuance.

It is also unclear when many of the MSW participating in the reviewed studies last deployed. Of the data presented, many last deployed in 2005, resulting in the risk of recall bias. Since then, there may have been improvements in MST related services, policies and procedures. MSW attending the VA would also have physical and mental health difficulties that may or may not be associated with deployment experiences, but may also have an impact on their perception of their experiences. As the current review highlights, MSW spend their careers trying to minimise the differences between themselves and the men, taking part in a partisan study only serves to create difference thus they may be more reluctant. Nevertheless further comparison studies may highlight the need for tailored strategies (Feldman & Hanlon, 2015).

#### **1.4.2 Clinical Implications**

Findings from this review indicate the need for organisational level interventions to promote gender equality and equal opportunities within the military. Rather than a general promotion this could be done in a way that is more targeted, drawing out some of the actual themes of struggle for MSW identified in this review to be more meaningful and perhaps persuasive. MSW are ideally placed to act as role models of

solidarity between women. Every effort should be made to ensure that governance systems operate to keep MSW safe and free from discrimination. More MSW at all ranks, delivering training and commanding missions could bring a greater breadth of experience and expertise to complex decision-making. In addition, increased equality has the potential to decrease discrimination, add greater protection for MSW against MST, and enhance processes relating to the reporting of assault. The review highlights the need for better regulation of MST services available to military personnel. Independent investigation would help to maintain high levels of transparency, fairness and rigor where MST is reported, leading to improvements in prosecution of perpetrators, and timely access to confidential MST related medical care.

MSW are likely to benefit from being able to validate their deployment experiences within a personal and professional context. They want and need the opportunity to process, reflect, and be listened to, with the expectation that this would assist them to continue to function at a high level within their professional roles, and to make a successful transition back to civilian life.

### **1.4.3 Directions for future research**

The current review supports the need for further qualitative research into the deployment experiences of MSW. There is a scarcity of qualitative research on this subject. Experiences of MSW may vary depending on various factors including but not limited to military arm, rank, relationship status, and operational role. Focused homogenous sampling may assist to reveal important nuances of MSW's experience. Further exploration is required into the post-deployment reintegration experiences of

MSW, as challenges to their service legitimacy and military identity may put specific groups of women at greater risk of a range of mental health and interpersonal difficulties. No qualitative studies exploring experiences of UK MSW were identified by the current review, with all themes based on the experiences of US MSW. In-depth exploration of deployment experiences using qualitative methodologies is now required for UK MSW.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

MSW are deployed in a variety of operational roles, and UK policy changes are set to increase their presence in front-line roles. The current review highlights how a patriarchal military culture reinforces widespread gender discrimination and abuse, which leads MSW to mask their feminine identity as a means of protection from denigration. As a gender minority, MSW can often feel isolated and experience a failed sense of belonging to their military family. MSW often report feeling permanently changed by their deployment experiences, resulting in mental health and interpersonal difficulties, which permeate their military and civilian identities.

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## **Chapter 2: Empirical Paper**

### **Exploring the lived experiences of UK military reservists during deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan**

*Prepared for submission to The British Journal of Psychology (please refer to Appendix C for instructions for authors for submission)*

Overall chapter word count (excluding figures, tables and reference list): 7988

## 2.0 Abstract

**Aims:** The complexity and often emotionally challenging experience of deployment is well supported in the literature, with particular attention paid to transitions for regular personnel and their families. However, little is known about the unique experiences of reservists who have served and returned to the United Kingdom. The present study aims to provide a detailed account of the lived experiences of British Army reservists during specific phases of the deployment cycle.

**Method:** Six participants were recruited. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

**Results:** Three superordinate themes emerged from the findings: “Forming military identity”; “Crystallisation of military identity”; and “Identity reconstruction”.

**Conclusions:** Participants lived experiences are considered in the light of existing literature and service policies. Clinical implications and directions for future research are discussed.

**Key words:** *Reservist, military identity, deployment cycle.*

## **2.1 Introduction**

### **2.1.1 Military Reserve in context**

The United Kingdom (UK) military reserve consists of approximately 36,000 volunteer reservists and 52,000 regular reservists (National Audit Office, 2006). Over the past 20 years the Ministry of Defense (MOD) has utilised military reservists at unprecedented levels. Since 2001, over 288,000 individual UK military personnel have served in Afghanistan and Iraq (Defence Statistics, 2015), and at the height of combat operations, approximately 12% of UK military personnel were reservists (National Audit Office, 2006). The publication of Future Reserves 2020 (FR20) highlights that the MODs continued reliance on reservist personnel is set to increase (MOD, 2013).

### **2.1.2 Changing landscape of deployment**

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have been uniquely characterised by deployments that are extended (>6 months), repeated, and associated with high rates of death and injury (Chandra, Burns, Tanielian, & Jaycox, 2011; Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009; Mansfield, Kaufman, Marshall & Gains, *et al.*, 2010). Since the beginning of these operations, there have been 453 UK military fatalities (30 volunteer reservists), with 2,188 personnel wounded in action and admitted to field hospital; 616 with serious injuries (Defence Statistics, 2015). With the introduction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and multiple insurgencies, all deployed personnel face the potential of combat regardless of operational role (Chandra *et al.*, 2011).

### **2.1.3 Impact of deployment on Reservists**

Studies from the UK and United States (US) have argued that, compared with regular military personnel, reservists have an increased prevalence of psychological difficulties post-deployment (Hotopf, Hull, Fear & Browne *et al.*, 2006; Miliken, Auchterloni & Hoge, 2007; Fear, Jones, Murphy & Hull *et al.*, 2010). Whilst a number of studies have found exposure to combat as a risk factor for mental health difficulties among regular forces (Hoge, Castro, Messer & McGurk *et al.*, 2004; Sundin, Fear, Iverson & Rona *et al.*, 2010), it has been argued by other research that mental health difficulties amongst reservists are more closely related to problems at home before, during and after deployment (Browne, Hull, Horne & Jones *et al.*, 2007; De Burgh *et al.*, 2010).

### **2.1.4 Phases of deployment**

Three distinct phases of deployment with various sub-divisions have been proposed including pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment (Pincus, 2001). Each phase is associated with unique stressors and emotions. The MOD released a comprehensive information and support guide for soldiers and their families of based on the emotional cycle of deployment (MOD, 2011a; 2011b; See Appendix D). To the author's knowledge, no research has specifically explored these phases from the perspective of soldiers themselves.

#### ***2.1.4.1. Pre-Deployment phase***

Existing research suggests that during the pre-deployment phase, reservists and their families may experience stress and confusion, feelings of shock and disbelief as well



as worry around the pending departure (Esposito-Smythers, Wolff, Lemmon & Bodzy *et al.*, 2011; Marnocha, 2012).

#### *2.1.4.2. Deployment phase*

During the deployment, research suggests that reservists and their families face stressors including uncertainty regarding the deployed soldier's safety (Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011); re-negotiation of boundaries and family roles; lack of understanding about deployment from the general public; inconsistent communication with the deployed, and exposure to regular media reports (Chandra *et al.*, 2011; Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

#### *2.1.4.3. Post-deployment phase*

Research has found that reservists and their families experience diverse emotions upon reunion following deployment (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Lapp, Taft, Tollefson & Hoepner *et al.*, 2010; Wiens & Boss, 2006). A growing body of evidence suggests that the reintegration period can be a particularly stressful time (Aducci, Baptist, George & Barros *et al.*, 2011; Marnocha, 2012; Sahlstein, Maguire & Timmerman, 2009; Wood, Scarville & Gravino, 1995).

### **2.1.5 Rationale**

Military research has predominantly adopted quantitative methodologies, based on the positivist assumption that there is a single objective reality (Robson, 2002). Conversely, qualitative methodology is based on the interpretivist view that reality is personally and socially constructed (Robson, 2002). The broad and interconnecting processes and perspectives relating to deployment are unlikely to be extrapolated

with any depth of understanding by reductionist methodology alone. Furthermore, research is predominantly focused on the effect of deployment on regular military personnel and their families, with limited exploration of homogenous reservist samples. Evidence suggests that reservists' experiences of deployment may differ from those of regular personnel, yet of the few qualitative studies published, reservists, regular personnel and their families are more frequently grouped together, potentially concealing the nuanced experiences of reservists.

It is also evident that different phases of the deployment cycle are associated with a variety of stressors and emotions. Research suggests that the experience of these stressors and emotions are idiosyncratic, and systemically mediated (Gilbey, Liebling, Barnard, & Simmonds *et al.*, unpublished thesis). As far as the author is aware, no published data exists specifically exploring the in-depth qualitative experiences of the deployment cycle for UK military reservists.

#### **2.1.6. Aims**

The present study aimed to further acknowledge and address the gap in existing literature by providing a detailed account of the experiences of UK reservists during specific phases of the deployment cycle. An in-depth idiographic exploration of these experiences afforded the opportunity to address the substantial costs and policy implications of conflict-related problems from the perspectives of the experiential experts, the reservists themselves (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

The guiding research question for the study was: what are the lived experiences of male army reservists deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan? The specific research aims included exploring the:

- a) Impact of pre-deployment experiences on the reservist;
- b) Impact of deployment experiences on the reservist;
- c) Impact of post-deployment reintegration on the reservist; and
- d) Reservists' ways of coping with their experiences

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.2.1 Research design**

For an exploratory focus in line with the research aims, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the preferred methodology/or analytic method as the aim was to explore how participants made sense of their personal experiences, rather than attempting to produce an objective or theoretical statement regarding deployment, nor to explore the way talk was used. Due to links with symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 2001) IPA methodology enables the complexities of the social and personal worlds of the reservist to be explored.

### **2.2.2 Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with experience of operational deployment. Following this, a snowballing sampling was also used, whereby volunteer participants were asked if they knew of any other reservists who may be interested in the study. Interviews continued until data of sufficient depth and richness had been captured to explore the range of experiences of the research aims.

*Table 2.1 Participant inclusion and exclusion criteria*

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Inclusion criteria</b> | i) British Army reservist.<br><br>ii) Active service for at least one operational tour - minimum of 4 months.<br><br>iii) Male.            |
| <b>Exclusion criteria</b> | i) Non-English Speaking.<br><br>ii) Deployed previously as a regular soldier.<br><br>iii) Attached to reservist unit as a regular soldier. |

*Table 2.2 Participant characteristics*

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Regiment</b>             | <b>Rank</b>    | <b>Time as Reservist (years)</b> | <b>Operational Deployments</b> |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Bob         | 47         | Royal Logistics Corps (RLC) | Lance Corporal | 7                                | Afghanistan                    |
| Dave        | 31         | Infantry                    | Private        | 14                               | Iraq                           |
| Fred        | 48         | RLC                         | Sergeant       | 20                               | Iraq                           |
| Ivan        | 35         | Infantry                    | Lance Corporal | 10                               | Iraq & Afghan.                 |
| Richard     | 29         | Infantry                    | Lieutenant     | 10                               | Afghanistan                    |
| Ted         | 52         | Infantry                    | Sergeant       | 31                               | Iraq                           |

Six participants were interviewed consistent with small samples typical of IPA methodology (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Inclusion and exclusion criteria are outlined in Table 2.1 Participants were invited to choose pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. The participant information is detailed in Table 2.2.

### **2.2.3 Procedure**

#### *2.2.3.1 Ethical Procedures*

The research was designed and carried out conforming to the British Psychological Society's (BPS) ethical guidelines (BPS, 2010) and guidelines for online recruitment (BPS, 2013). Ethical approval was granted by Coventry University ethics committee (Appendix E).

#### *2.2.3.2 Materials*

Six face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted and one telephone interview. Questions were developed following the recommendations made by Smith and colleagues (2009) as well as consultation with reservists and healthcare professionals with a specialist interest in military personnel. Four open-ended questions were developed with example prompts to enable flexibility, and to be guided by participant narrative. The interview outline was graphically represented (Appendix F), to allow flexibility between questions without impeding the natural flow of the interview.

#### *2.2.3.3 Recruitment*

Posters inviting volunteers to participate (Appendix G) were sent using email to local and national military charities, and posted on Army reservists social media webpages and forums. Potential participants contacted the researcher using email or telephone to discuss the study in more detail and to address questions or concerns. Eligible volunteers were invited to attend an interview. A total of ten potential participants contacted the researcher for further details. Two volunteers were not

eligible due to having regular military status, and two withdrew their interest following the initial contact.

#### *2.2.3.4 Interview Procedure*

Interviews were carried out at mutually agreed, private community venues close to the participant's residence. Prior to the interview, participants were invited to review the participant information sheet and consent forms, with the opportunity to explore any questions and concerns before obtaining written consent. All interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 62 to 151 minutes. Detailed field notes capturing non-verbal communication were recorded during the interviews, along with the researcher's visceral reactions and immediate reflections. Once the interviews were completed, reservists were provided with an information pack, detailing local and national support services. (Appendix H).

#### **2.2.4 Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to enable full immersion in the data and to begin the analytic process. At this stage all identifiable information was removed. Data analysis was consistent with Smith and colleagues' (2009) IPA methodological procedures (Appendix I). Transcripts were printed, read and re-read with exploratory comments written in the right margin and interpretations underlined. Emergent themes were identified and written in the left margin. The themes were listed chronologically and cut out onto coloured card to develop a visual map of emerging themes. Supporting quotes were highlighted, then separated from the main body of text and clustered together. Data were then analysed and sub-themes were collated into superordinate themes (Appendix J).

#### *2.2.4.1. Research validity*

To ensure that participants' experiences of the subject under investigation were faithfully recorded, the principal investigator maintained an audit trail demonstrating how the analysis was carried out. Documentation of raw data, data analysis, coding schemes, theme development and keeping a reflexive journal, ensured that the emergent themes fully represented participants' reflections. Members of the supervision team independently validated initial coding and emergent themes. The researcher's reflections were explored and incorporated into the analytic process. Crucially, participants were invited to check their transcripts and validate emergent themes. All participants consented to this during the interview process, but no participants returned requests for feedback on emergent themes.

#### *2.2.4.2 Researcher's position*

The researcher, a trainee clinical psychologist, had served as a British Army reservist. Having experience of and contacts within the military system was very helpful for recruitment, as posting adverts regarding the research on reservist social media pages was aided by existing relationships with serving personnel. Furthermore, as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist undertaking a specialist placement with the West Midlands Veteran's Project, contacts with veteran's charities and networks which proved invaluable with a population with whom engagement is reported to be difficult were facilitated (Ashcroft, 2014). Critical to the hermeneutic foundation of IPA, the researcher adopted a reflexive position regarding the influence of personal beliefs and attitudes on the research process. A bracketing interview between the principal investigator and a member of the research team was conducted, audio recorded and transcribed for reflective analysis. During the

interviews and subsequent analysis, the research team met frequently to explore the researcher's beliefs and experiences, and to manage the impact of subjectivity on the research process.

## 2.3 Results

Three superordinate themes were elicited from the data analysis including; 1) 'Forming the military identity', consisting of three sub-themes; 2) 'Crystallisation of military identity', consisting of 2 sub-themes; and 3) 'Erosion of identity', consisting of three sub-themes. The findings are summarised in table 2.3. The themes broadly follow the deployment cycle, with theme 1 largely capturing pre-deployment experiences, theme 2 capturing deployment experiences, and theme 3 capturing post-deployment experiences. The themes are reported in the results section below and highlighted with verbatim quotes from participants. Consideration is given to convergence and divergence within each theme.

*Table 2.3. Superordinate and subordinate themes*

| Superordinate themes                                     | Subordinate themes  |
|--|---|
| Theme 1. Forming military identity                       | a) "Opportunity to be a real soldier"<br>b) "Sausage factory"<br>c) "Our own little family" |
| Theme 2. Crystallisation of military identity            | a) "We look after our own"<br>b) "Inside the wire"  |
| Theme 3. Reconstructing military and civilian identities | a) "I was superfluous"<br>b) "You just drift"<br>c) "I had to recalculate myself"           |



### **2.3.1. Theme 1: Forming military identity**

All of the participants reflected on the importance of their deployment experiences in forming their military identity. This super-ordinate theme emerged mainly through discussion of pre-deployment experiences, and contains three sub-themes: “Opportunity to be a real soldier”, “Sausage factory” and “Our own little family”

#### *2.3.1.1. Theme 1a: “Opportunity to be a real soldier”*

All of the participants reflected on how deployment was part of the role, and an “opportunity to be a real soldier” (Ivan, Line 95), indicating that without deployment experiences, their role and therefore their military identity might be incomplete. For all participants, deployment had, to some degree been ‘part of the plan’, and for Bob and Richard, represented the achievement of a lifelong ambition:

I volunteered as soon as I was off the square basically... It was the only reason I joined the Reserves basically...[a] childhood dream

(Bob, Lines 12-13)

Bob’s repeated use of ‘basically’ appears to reveal the fundamental nature of deployment not just as part of his military identity, but also his sense of self. Furthermore, the word ‘dream’ speaks of a fantasy as yet unfulfilled, a sentiment echoed by Richard:

Going out to a warzone to do a job... a real job and making a real difference to people's lives... tangible proof of something that I've been working toward for my whole life.

(Richard, Lines 341-344)

Richard's reflections demonstrated the hard work and commitment exhibited by reservists, who had historically been branded as 'weekend warriors' (Dandeker, Eversden-French, Greenberg, *et al.*, 2010). It also revealed that deployment represented validation of his military identity. In the participants' views, to not have deployed would have nullified the 'meaningful contribution' of being a reservist, and simultaneously endorsed the characterisation of reservists as 'faking it', a point emphasised emphatically by Dave who said:

It's not just lads fucking around you know, there is a real job behind it...

(Dave, Lines 107-109)

Dave's use of profanity in this statement could be interpreted as a discharge of concealed anger regarding the way he experienced reservists being viewed less seriously by some. The use of 'you know' to address the interviewer suggests a need to ensure that this message is understood. Combined, it appears to illustrate Dave's desire to defend his military identity from the denigration of being regarded as 'just a hobby'. Richard elaborates on this point, revealing how this disparagement could be internalised, creating a need for him to prove his worth to others and himself:

If I'm not the kind of guy that would volunteer to go out there then I am a hypocrite... you know almost like a coward in that respect... you'll enjoy having the uniform and rolling around at the weekends but you won't have the gumption to actually get up and do your bit... then you're doing it under false pretenses.

(Richard, Lines 34-40)

Richard's account and use of the word 'hypocrite' illustrates how for him, deployment differentiates the bravery of the 'real' reservist soldiers, from the cowardice and insincerity of those he feels are pretending, or 'play-acting'. The tone of his account appears to reveal anger toward those who do not deploy, and by doing so undermine the integrity of reservist's collective military identity and self-esteem.

#### *2.3.1.2. Theme 1b: "Sausage factory"*

Following the receipt of deployment confirmation, all participants reflected on the 'process' of pre-deployment training, which Ivan, Ted, and Fred referred to as the 'sausage factory' (Fred, Line 100) where 'the military step up and take over' (Ted, Line 53). The combination of 'process' and 'sausage factory' appears to represent a feeling of dehumanisation and deindividualisation, whereby metaphorically, the civilian enters at one end and emerges the other, mechanically and chemically altered and wrapped in a new skin identical to the next. It is arguable that the manufacture of reservist soldiers, shaped and 'formed' into a 'body' of men, appears

to portray that during pre-deployment training, military identity is embodied and integrated firmly within the self, as captured by Dave, who reflected:

You don't go anywhere without your weapon and your helmet and they become a piece of you.

(Dave, Lines 597-600)

Moreover, Dave's experiences could be interpreted as a detachment from civilian individuality and soul. Ted further reflected on the focus and commitment required for pre-deployment training, and how he felt disconnected from his civilian life: '...the families have already lost us basically' (Ted, Lines 68-72). Reflecting on how he was already 'lost' perhaps indicated how part of him had been removed by military processing. The slip into present tense may indicate that the feeling of being 'lost to his family' was pervasive and remains still, or yet to be processed fully. Ted went on to describe the profound effects of one particular exercise, which touched a 'personal place', 'deep within [his] hard drive' leaving him questioning his sense of self, reflecting:

I forgot... who it was happening to... I had to take a long hard look in the mirror and think, am I the person I think I am?

(Ted, Lines 119-131)

Ted's account appeared to intimate an 'identity crisis', with Ted searching for his 'lost self'. His language suggests the possibility of him finding himself again,

whereas Dave's reflections on pre-deployment training symbolised a more permanent 'death' of his former civilian self:

You're always shown the worst-case scenarios, so every patrol, every exercise you did, you're always getting blown up, shot, killed.

(Dave, Lines 204-208)

Dave's experiences capture how during pre-deployment training, he was confronted by the very real possibility of his death. Arguably, this experience represents the metaphorical death of the civilian, and an altered state of emotional processing through the habituation and dissociation from the painful and disturbing experiences.

#### *2.3.1.3. Theme 1c: "Our own little family"*

Previous research has highlighted the importance of developing strong bonds with comrades in forming military identity (Green *et al.*, 2010). Participants in the current research echoed this point, and stressed the importance of being part of a 'military family'. Whilst reservists may have experienced a feeling of 'detachment' from their civilian selves and families, five participants reflected on how they formed powerful attachments with their comrades during pre-deployment training, as Ted expressed: 'it was all about bonding as a platoon' (Ted, Lines 100-101). Ted goes on to explore the sense of 'family' developed through his deployment experiences:

You'll be these guys'... mother, their father, their auntie, their uncle, their grandfather... you're the person they're going to come to because they trust you completely.

(Ted, Lines 152-154)

Ted's reflections demonstrated the profound level of care, responsibility, and protection associated with that of a mother, father or grandparent. He conveys a deep sense of belonging to a military family, which appears to mirror and supersede attachment relationships with his civilian family. A shared sense of trust, purpose and identity emerged during this period, with Bob, Dave, Fred, Ivan and Ted all reflecting on how the 'camaraderie' kicked in, as Dave captures:

It was kind of how I imagined regular life to be... we got to know each other pretty well so the barriers that you normally see ... all that breaks down and you become one.

(Dave, Lines 240-251)

Dave's account reveals an implicit comparison with regular personnel, which occurs through all participants' reflections. It illustrates how the sense of purpose associated with deployment brings meaning to training, brings reservists together with a common aim and forms a collective military identity.

Whilst being part of a 'close nit body of people' (Ted, Lines 39-40) was experienced by those who deployed as part of a reservist unit, Richard and Ivan both had experiences as individual replacements, meaning that they deployed alone to replace

regular personnel. Richard deployed as an Officer, attending pre-deployment training alone, and reflected on how he missed out on the bonding experience:

They were all part of the same unit and [there's] me looking around going I don't know what's going on and I don't know anybody! I felt that I was missing out on the opportunities to build those strong bonds of people that were going through the same stuff as you.

(Richard, Lines 174-183)

Richard's reflections highlight the feeling of isolation and confusion he experienced, revealing a sense of sadness for failed belonging, the loss of an ideal, and envy regarding the bonds enjoyed by those around him.

### **2.3.2 Theme 2: Crystallisation of military identity**

#### *2.3.2.1. Theme 2a: "We look after our own"*

Participants reflected on how their military identity crystallised in the hostile conditions and ever-present threat of deployment. Dave, Ivan, and Ted reflected on their experiences of being 'outside the wire' and how the sense of meaning experienced through their operational role helped them to deal with the 'threat to life' and remain focused, but also how that threat led to a deep feeling of trust between members of their unit. Dave's reflections capture the level of fear experienced during his early patrols:

The first time outside the wire I was really nervous you know you think everything is going to blow up, everyone's going to kill you and so after a few patrols, you know... you kind of realise... what's normal... for me then, it was just a job.

(Dave, Lines 735-741)

Dave continues to describe how he 'enjoyed' the patrols despite the risks as it felt that he was doing something 'meaningful'. Central to this meaningfulness for all participants' deployment experiences, was the need to 'protect', as Ivan reflects:

Well that's why you do it. You're protecting the guys, protecting the British people, protecting the locals.

(Ivan, Lines 216-217)

Importantly, participants' experience of being a protector was not just part of their military identity, but 'intrinsic' to their sense of self. Arguably, the participants attribute a powerful sense of meaning to the role as a protector that allows them to perform their duties. Single-mindedly focusing on 'protecting the guys' gives both the individual and the group a sense of transcendental safety. This type of dynamic creates an incredibly profound level of trust within the group, as Ted reveals:



I trusted those lads implicitly, you know, and they trusted me... It was inset in me... I was first vehicle so if there was anyone first out on the ground, it was me.

(Ted, Lines 301-305)

Ted's desire to be the first out on the ground, speaks of the willingness to put himself in harm's way to protect his comrades. This level of self-sacrifice was described as being demonstrated 'without even thinking' which may have been a necessary way of coping with the challenges of deployment, as Dave captures:

You tend not to think about it too much and function.

(Dave, Line 734 – 735)

This short reflection from Dave perhaps reveals the unspoken assumption that to think and feel might lead to malfunction. Therefore, in order to function he must act unthinkingly, and be emotionally 'detached', thereby protecting himself and his comrades, and further crystallising his military identity.

#### *2.3.2.2. Theme 2b: "Inside the wire"*

All participants reported that the biggest challenge of deployment was remaining 'inside the wire', where at times it could feel like being locked in 'solitary confinement' (Fred, Lines 296-297). This powerful metaphor indicates the intense feeling of isolation and lack of freedom experienced when the 'tedious' and 'mundane' aspects of deployment had to be 'endured', as Fred recalls:

It gets a bit soul destroying, a bit despairing. It was menial tasks... it was just dragging, you know what's the point in us being here?

(Fred, Lines 255 – 256)

The contrast between the excitement and danger of patrols, and the sometimes 'mundane' tasks performed inside the wire, was striking. Fred's reflections on the 'soul destroying' tasks inside the wire, capture how for him, the lack of a meaningful contribution felt like an attack on his very character, in danger of annihilating his very humanity. Outside the wire, reservists face a tangible, external threat from which they can protect themselves and each other. Inside the wire, they face a far more existentialist threat. In this context 'time to think' becomes a threat to the self, as it 'would absolutely destroy you' (Richard, Line 381).

Inside the wire, participants found that they were more likely to experience interpersonal conflict, where differences between people were exaggerated and, the usual 'military banter' could escalate, as Ted recalls:

This guy took it to the next level... he was taking the piss out of the cap badge and you know... I said... we'll sort it out like real blokes... disrespect my cap badge again and we'll see how we get on.

(Ted, Lines 399-406)

Ted's account appears to illustrate how inside the wire, the stress of deployment can become a threat to the collective military identity. Outside the wire, the enemy represents the threat that the military collectively must defeat. Inside the wire

dividing lines are drawn along natural boundaries of difference, such as regimental cap badges. Ted protects his sense of belonging and his military identity, symbolised by the regimental ‘cap badge’.

### **2.3.3 Theme 3: Reconstructing the military and civilian self**

Following the ‘relief’ of having completed a tour of duty, all participants reflected on the insidious erosion of their military identity through the loss of structure and role, and important military relationships. In addition, Participants reflected on how they struggled to reconnect with their civilian identity, leaving them feeling isolated and detached. This theme contains the sub-themes “I was superfluous”, “You just drift” and “Recalculating myself”.

#### *2.3.3.1. Theme 3a: “I was superfluous”*

All of the participants reflected on how they felt ‘redundant’ when they were relieved of their operational role in the last few weeks of their deployment. They spoke of how they tried to keep ‘occupied’ during that time, and how days began to revolve around mealtimes, as Dave illustrates:

You’re just waiting... for the planes really. Once the new unit is happy, then you’re kind of redundant in terms of operational role, we’re just 120 people waiting for a plane.

(Dave, Lines 885-888)

Dave’s reflections captured the feeling of no longer being necessary or ‘useful’, and that without his operational role, he conveys that he is ‘just’ another person. This

perhaps indicates how being stripped of the operational role equates to being stripped of his military identity, sense of belonging and self-esteem, a point elaborated by Bob:

We were pretty much homeless and we were trying to share one blanket  
between the lot of us sleeping outside

(Bob, Lines 415-416)

From Bob's reflections, it appears that without his usefulness with regards to his operational role, he and his comrades had been cast out of their 'home', abandoned by their military family, and forced to 'fend for themselves'.

Following this period of redundancy, participants reflected on 'decompression', which Dave refers to as "the worst thing about going home" (Dave, Lines 961-962). After flying from Afghanistan or Iraq, reservists were required to spend a period of time in a military installation to relieve themselves of the 'tension', 'friction' and 'anger' that may have developed during deployment, as Dave reflects:

You go into decompression which is your sort of transition to civilian life  
um... doing nothing which seemed like the worst thing that they could do  
because all we wanted to do was go home but they gated us.

(Dave, Lines 967-973)

The language of 'decompression' and once again 'process', betrays a dehumanisation and deindividualisation of the Reservist's deployment experiences.

Decompression, a gradual reduction of pressure on someone who has been experiencing high pressure, is perhaps an example of the participants' experiences of the military's mechanised approach to the emotional burden of deployment. In addition it could be argued that decompression represents the final squeezing out of their remaining military identity.

#### 2.3.3.2. Theme 3b: *"You just drift..."*

Bob, Dave, Ivan and Ted, all reflected on the sadness they felt as a result of the gradual disconnection with their 'military family', as Dave illustrates:

You sort of missed everybody because you spend so long together and then you sort of bomb burst to the four corners of... yeah, my room mate, my top-cover actually... we got to know each other well during deployment... and you just drift really.

(Dave, Lines 1055-1066)

Dave's reflections capture the level of intimacy reached during deployment experiences. Not only a roommate, Dave's 'top-cover' was protecting his life by putting himself in harms way, covering 360 degree arcs from the top of Dave's vehicle with his weapon system. The intensity of deployment forges 'unique' relationships, yet once deployment is over Dave's use of the term 'bomb burst' appears to illustrate how he and his friends were violently separated, and left feeling a world apart, a point echoed by Bob as he sadly expressed his experience of loss:

I went a little bit off the rails when I got back and thinking back on it, I missed it a lot! I missed being with the guys, I missed that camaraderie, I missed the banter, missed having the crack. There was one occasion where I was sitting in the porch having a little cry.

(Bob, Lines 424 – 428)

Dave continues to articulate the feeling of being from different worlds, and how as a civilian, his sense of connection achieved through shared purpose and identity of deployment was lost:

It's easy on tour because everyone has the same job... but getting back here you might chat with someone who is a chartered surveyor and got no idea what he's talking about and it's not easy to engage... If we're not talking about army stuff, you know then there wouldn't be a lot of conversation with some of them.

(Dave, Lines 1079 – 1087)

For those who deployed as individual replacements, the sense of 'isolation' from having experienced something unique without others to share it with is striking, as Ivan recalls:

I know that the times that I came back, I felt very isolated because nobody shared the same experience.

(Ivan, Lines 460 – 461)

#### *2.3.3.3. Theme 3c: “I had to recalculate myself”*

Participants reflected on the narrative that they had regarding their return home, a fantasy of being celebrated as a ‘war hero’ and being welcomed by their families and friends. For those who experienced a welcome home parade, reintegration remained challenging, but they felt that their service had been recognised and validated. For those who returned as individual replacements, the sense of isolation and lack of validation was difficult to make sense of.

When Ted and Ivan returned as part of the same unit with which they deployed, they were welcomed with a parade at their regimental headquarters, an experience that served to validate and celebrate their service, as Ted recalled:

People were coming up to you and hugging you, and it’s not until you return you realise just what you have done...I wasn’t prepared for that... It was quite overwhelming all the people coming up and shaking your hand... It completely rocked you... it was an incredible experience [smiling]... yeah that was great.

(Ted, Lines 324-345)

Ted’s reflections illustrate the importance of participants having their service validated by families, friends and other service personnel, as if without it, their

experiences would not be real. The emotional impact of this validation is clear, the sense of overwhelming pride and gratitude being felt throughout Ted's very being, conveyed through his use of the word 'rocked' as if shook to his very core with positive energy. However, for Richard, who deployed and returned alone, the 'surreal' experience of coming home was entirely different:

Coming home I'd say was a massive anticlimax. You're coming home with this narrative or story of coming home and actually everyone's life has been carrying on whilst you've been away you know... I got out of the gate at [airfield] with my bag... and my mum came to pick me up... you know, just having done a tour in Afghanistan and being picked up by your mum... Nuts! Absolutely nuts!

(Richard, Lines 706-717)

Richard emphasised that his returning home experience was 'nuts,!' which could be interpreted to convey difficulty in integrating his 'narrative' into the reality he now faced. It may also reveal that whilst his return home should have been the climax of his tour and a validation of his service, Richard appeared to feel disrespected and devalued. He went on to reflect on how he had to 'recalculate' himself in order to 'fit back into' his civilian life with his wife:



It was tough. I had this narrative in my head, she had a narrative in her head and ... I had to fit back into her life. It wasn't a case of she had to change her life for me, and that was tough!

(Richard, Lines 753-755)

Richard again emphasises the differences between his fantasy and the reality, and highlights how he no longer felt like the right shape or quality to 'fit' into his wife's life. After being 'formed' or 'shaped' to embody the military identity in order to be 'good enough' to belong to the military family, perhaps this account reveals that reservist's feel they need to recalculate themselves in order to be accepted back into civilian life. In this respect, the sense of identity is transient, and not fully owned by the individual.

Dave reflected on how the stripping of his military uniform, the armour and weaponry which had been a piece of him, left him feeling vulnerable and lost, with 'no idea what to do.'

You kind of feel like after walking around in body armor and a weapon, not having a weapon felt strange and yeah it was kind of like that was your protection. Whatever happened you had your weapon... you felt almost vulnerable.

(Dave, Lines 1022-1030)

It is arguable that this account reveals how he felt abandoned by the military, and must now relearn how to survive in a civilian world that he experiences as alien and unfamiliar. Indeed, the absence of the military structure and the ‘freedom’ of being a civilian was a difficult experience for Bob:

We were being dragged out of it, back into civilian life without any transition was... was a shock... the regimental way of life, military way of life you know, but instead it was there you go, complete freedom.

(Bob, Lines 436 – 445)

Bob’s reflections highlight how the transition from military to civilian was a ‘shock’. It illustrates how the change from one way of life to another feels sudden and traumatic for the reservist, who now feels lost without the scaffolding of the regimented military way of life.

The transition to civilian life was particularly difficult for Ted and his family, as Ted struggled to deal with the emotional impact of his deployment:

Very emotional times when I came back... My younger brother struggled with his emotions, just couldn’t get his head around it... he wanted to know why I’d gone out and left my family going out fighting, and he’d made up his mind that I wasn’t going to come back... he couldn’t stop crying... but how do you say to a person like that you understand when you haven’t got a clue... you just sort of feel totally detached... I came back a different person.

(Ted, Lines 702 – 713)

Ted's reflections reveal how the emotional detachment required to survive the distressing experiences of deployment left him feeling like a 'different person', no longer able to communicate on an emotional level with his civilian family. For a long period post-deployment, Ted spoke about how he felt 'claustrophobic' and spent nights sleeping in a military cot bed in his garage or in a bivvie in his garden because, as he put it: 'it reminded me of being back there.' (Ted, Lines 738-739)

## **2.4 Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of British Army reservists during the deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. By valuing and paying particular attention to the personal meanings associated with the participant's deployment experiences, it was hoped to gain in-depth information that would further understandings of this unique population, whilst also informing clinical practice and potentially military policy and procedures. Three superordinate themes emerged from the data analysis, which, are discussed in relation to the existing literature: '*Forming military identity*', '*Crystallisation of military identity*'; and '*Restructuring military and civilian identities*'. The current findings support recent research with US military veterans, reporting identity conflict associated with military service and reintegration following deployment (Smith & True, 2014).

### **2.4.1 Discussion of findings**

#### **2.4.1.1 Theme 1: Forming the military identity**

The current research findings reveal that for some reservists the opportunity to deploy represented the realisation of a 'childhood dream' and the chance to be a 'real soldier', echoing the experiences of their regular comrades (Smith & True, 2014).

Others however, expressed more ambivalent experiences that may be associated with recognition of the level of sacrifice required and the ethical ambiguity of combat. This experience is not necessarily unique to reservists, but seldom reported in findings from studies with regular military personnel (Finley, 2011).

The authors argue that these findings highlight how social and cultural expectations create a context where the reservists' identity and self-esteem are contingent on deployment (Goffman, 1959). Once the decision to deploy is made, the current research reveals how reservists are systematically dispossessed of their civilian identity through pre-deployment training (Goffman, 1961), and strong attachment bonds are formed with their 'military family' (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

Upon joining the British Army, reservists withstand basic training, a disciplining experience with high levels of regimentation and control, which begins a process of removing individuality, agency and attachment to their civilian selves (Hockey, 1986; Goffman, 1959). Whereas regular personnel remain embedded within the military system following basic training, reservists retain membership to both military and civilian identities (Griffith, 2009). The current research revealed how periodic training, lack of role definition, perceived lack of purpose and social divide between reservist units, eroded connection with their military identity, thereby endorsing the 'weekend warrior' stereotype.

The current study suggests that reservists feel that they fail to acquire the status of 'real soldiers' and thus experience the need to continually prove their military identity (Green, Emslie, O'Neill, Hunt & Walker, 2010, O'Brien, Hunt & Hart,

2005). It is argued therefore, that reservists' experience their military identity as contingent on deployment, which is thus essential for its formation. Therefore, the choice to deploy is not experienced as an 'informed choice', but unconsciously determined by the desire to achieve social and cultural acceptance. As the reservists explained, they must deploy or risk rejection and condemnation as a 'coward'.

Reservists conveyed how pre-deployment training revitalised their military identity through a renewed sense of collective purpose. Interviews revealed a transition from 'I' to 'we' as the reservists' self-concept became dominated by identification with the military social group through structured and purposeful training (Griffith, 2009). Participants described the process as a 'sausage factory', where it is argued that the self is processed to integrate the hegemonic masculine ideology that revers physical toughness, stoicism, endurance, loyalty and aggression (Hockey, 1986; Barrett, 1996). This is consistent with previous research that suggests that military culture shapes military identities that are embodied within the self (Van der Kolk, 2015; Beder 2012; Hall, 2016; Moore 2012) and solidify unit cohesion (Siebold, 2006).

#### **2.4.1.2 Theme 2: Crystallisation of military identity**

This study found that military identity and prevailing cultural narratives are crystallised during deployment due in part to the perception of being involved in something meaningful and significant, a finding supported by previous literature (Grimell, 2016; Pargament, 2011). Participants expressed how the pervasive threat of combat deepens the experience of unit cohesion, creating a profound level of mutual interdependence, care and trust, which solidifies their military identity. Consistent with findings from regular military personnel, the omnipresent threats are subsumed

within the ‘military family’, providing a sense of transcendent safety as participants reported that they would unthinkingly put their lives on the line in order ‘to protect the guys’ (Friedman, 2006).

The current research also highlights the use of emotional suppression, including ‘banter’ as a means for reservists to protect themselves and others from painful and distressing experiences. Previous literature states that emotional suppression, including humour, has a long history in the military, which enables them to be effective soldiers (Reger & Moore, 2009). Participants in the current study shared how they believed that thinking too much and emotional connection with home would be devastating for their wellbeing. Emotional control and dissociation are viewed by participants in the current study as vital for survival and maintenance of the hyper-masculine military ideal. However, it has also been argued that repeated dissociation results in loss of contact with the ‘real self’ and important interpersonal relationships (Reger & moore, 2009). Therefore this study argues that services need to be sensitive to the impact of dissociation and emotional control on reservists’ wellbeing.

The research findings revealed that participants felt that being ‘inside the wire’, and performing ‘mundane’ or ‘tedious’ tasks was a significant threat to their identity. Being inside the wire gave them the time to think about themselves, where they were and what they were missing back in their civilian lives. It also stripped them of their sense of meaning and purpose, and therefore questioned their military significance. This finding is supported by Smith & True, (2014) who carried out research with

regular personnel, who reported a paradoxical sense safety that they felt outside the wire.

#### **2.4.1.3 Theme 3: Reconstructing the military and civilian identities**

Previous research has reported that the embedded military identity can challenge reintegration into civilian life (Buell, 2010), requiring a reorganisation of the self and prevailing narratives (Grimell, 2016). The individualist context of western civilian life is argued to be counter to the collectivist hierarchical military culture (French, 2005; Grimell, 2016), thus reintegration can be experienced as a ‘culture shock’, transitioning from the ‘black and white’ world of deployment to the uncertainty and unpredictability of civilian life. As reported by their regular colleagues, upon return to civilian life, participants described significant feelings of sadness surrounding the loss of military comrades, and their military identity (Brunger, Ogden & Serrato, 2013). Challenges with transition from military to civilian are widely reported in the literature, but this has been focused on the transition of regular personnel at the point of discharge from the military (Gilbey *et al.*, unpublished thesis). The current research highlights that reservists experience similar challenges, but with the additional potential for multiple transitions between military and civilian identities.

Furthermore, as regular personnel return from deployment, they typically remain immersed in the military culture with colleagues, families and friends who often understand the military context and have shared experiences, thus retaining their military identity. The current findings highlight that reservists often return in isolation. Even for those who deployed and returned as part of a unit, the sense of isolation is still present. As individuals return to their civilian jobs in geographically

dispersed locations, the relationships forged in combat drift away with the lost sense of shared purpose and identity. This left reservists feeling that they had to ‘recalculate’ their identities to fit with the civilian context but struggled to emerge from the soldier identity that had distanced them from their civilian relationships. This lends support to previous findings where military personnel face an existential struggle over losing both their military and civilian identities, and no longer ‘fitting in’ (Messecar, 2017; Grimell, 2016; Kopasz & Connery, 2015; Thoits, 2011, Williams, 1984). Previous authors have argued that changes in identity are particularly relevant to those who believe that their service is not appreciated (Shay, 2002).

Consistent with research with regular personnel, participants reported that they struggled to renegotiate and redefine family roles, routines, and boundaries leaving them feeling unwanted or unneeded (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Reger and Moore, 2009). Consistent with attachment-based theories (Riggs & Riggs, 2011), emotional suppression and detachment may assist reservists to function with the stress of deployment (Dandeker, Eversden, Birtles. & Wessely, 2013). However, this way of coping may also negatively impact reintegration, as emotional detachment threatens the attachment bond and can lead to interpersonal conflict (Gambardella, 2008, Vormbrock, 1993; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). As some authors have argued, the significance of military role, and its collectivist nature embedded in a military identity are not necessarily conducive to emotional intimacy (Keeling, Woodhead, & Fear, 2015).



### **2.4.2 Clinical and service implications**

The complexity and emotionally challenging experience of deployment is supported in the literature, but often focuses on regular personnel and their families. The findings of the present study highlighted that reservist's experiences of deployment are qualitatively different to their regular colleagues. Firstly, the reservist's military identity, sense of worth and purpose appears dependent on and contained within the deployment cycle. Whilst the military identity of regular personnel is largely consistent until discharge, reservists' military identity is somewhat transient (Migliore & Pound, 2016). Secondly, similar to their regular counterparts, reservists find reintegration post-deployment particularly challenging. Yet whilst regular personnel typically return as a unit immersed in a military culture and community, reservists often return in isolation, and are geographically and culturally dispersed.

It is crucial that the military and civilian support services understand the lived experiences of reservists, guiding intervention at an individual and systemic level, and being responsive to their use of dissociation and emotional distance as a coping strategy. Furthermore, the support literature available for regular personnel is not necessarily applicable to reservists. The authors therefore argue that the 'emotional cycle of deployment' (MOD, 2011a; 2011b), could be adapted to more accurately capture the reservists' own lived experiences.

### **2.4.3 Methodological limitations**

The findings of the present study should be considered within the following limitations. The homogeneity of the sample limits the findings to represent the experiences of Army reservists only, and does not include those of other military

groups. The participants in the present study were all currently serving reservists, and it is possible that their experiences may be different from those who deployed and subsequently discharged from military service.

#### **2.4.4 Recommendations for further research**

The use of a larger sample could develop further the important themes resulting from the current research. Further qualitative analysis targeted at the experiences of different reservist arms, rank, and gender may reveal divergent experiences and commonalities between homogeneous samples. Qualitative research specifically designed to explore reservists' training experiences; the impact of their trauma experiences; and post-deployment relational experiences, may deepen understandings of this population. There is a growing interest in the impact of deployment for military families. Given the nuanced experiences of reservists highlighted by the current study, it is likely that their families may have experiences that regular families do not. Further research in this area, and the implications for support services is therefore needed, in addition to research into the perceptions of reservists within the wider community. Further research is also needed to evaluate the efficacy and to explore the lived experiences of targeted interventions.

#### **2.5 Conclusion**

The decision to deploy is a deeply personal one, whilst simultaneously social and culturally orchestrated. Like their regular colleagues, the current study argues that reservists develop a profound connection with their military identity and connection with their comrades, which they resiliently protect and of which they prove themselves worthy. Unlike their regular colleagues, the current research found that

reservists' military identity was transient, and on return to their civilian lives, reservists reported feeling that they were stripped of their identity, their relationships and validation of their service. It is argued that services could provide tailored support to more effectively address the particular emotional effects of frequent and multiple transitions experienced by reservists, alongside building further awareness of the needs of this population in the military and civilian community.

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## **Chapter 3: Reflective Paper**

### **Chapter 3 Reflections on the diverse roles of a clinical psychologist: Integrating contextual identities**

Overall chapter word count (exclusive of references): 3349

### **3.1 Introduction**

As a profession, clinical psychology is unique. Clients and research participants are often invited to share their most intimate internal experiences. This is a privilege but sometimes also an ethical responsibility for the psychologist who needs to be sufficiently self-aware to avoid potentially shaming and invalidating experiences in the context of research and clinical practice (Lee & Wheeler, 2013). Some authors contend that awareness of co-existing processes through reflective and reflexive practice is a professional necessity (Padesky, 1996; Staudinger, 1999; O'Loughlin, 2003; Stedmon, Mitchell, Johnstone, & Staite, 2003), and this is a position that I passionately endorse.

Reflection refers to the awareness of momentary experiences whilst engaged in an activity including therapy and research (Dalos & Stedman, 2009). In contrast, reflexivity refers to retrospective consideration of experiences and the impact of one's own personal, professional, political beliefs and values (Finlay, 2002; Berger, 2015; Dalos & Stedman, 2009; Giddens, 1990; Burkitt, 2012). The following chapter offers my own reflexive account of conducting qualitative research on the subject of military identity. I consider my identity as a researcher, a clinician and as an ex-military reservist in relation to my personal and professional narratives.

### **3.2 The scientist-practitioner identity: epistemological conflict**

In this section, I discuss my epistemological position, and the tension that exists between my identity as a scientist/researcher and as a clinician. Qualitative methodology provides a philosophically congruent resolution to this conflict.

Scientific method is grounded in positivism and reductionist philosophies, based on the supposition of a common reality. The argument is that truth can only be derived from the observation of the properties and relationships of natural phenomena, deduced through reason and logic. Chibbaro Rondoni and Vulpiani (2014) argue that the natural world is believed to be hierarchical, and by reducing phenomena to their fundamental components a 'theory of everything' can be revealed.

In his work, Foucault (2002) argues that scientific enterprise is dedicated to the doctrine of universality and deterministic laws. Knowledge has therefore become the possession of those whom speak the language of logic. Precision, clarity and rigor regarding both observation and language is therefore believed to generate epistemic certainty. He argues that science has become the regime of truth, with status and power for doctors and professors who are charged with saying what counts as true. That which is counted as evidence has become heavily biased by the academic and political narratives within which power resides (Foucault, 2002).

These issues were an important considerations for my research. I reflected on the focus I placed on conducting research in a way that my participants were empowered by their experiences. I wanted first and foremost to collect data that captured the quality of my participants' experiences so that their thoughts and feelings would be heard, firmly placing the power of the research findings within their perceptions of their realities. It is the quality of these experiences that reveals the social and cultural features of distress, and exemplifies a much-needed antidote to the medicalisation of distress and dehumanising aspects of scientific investigation.



In my opinion it feels as if clinical psychology is ‘uncomfortably seated’ within the realms of medicine and academia. As clinicians within psychiatric settings, clinical psychologists have also learned to speak the language of medicine, sometimes accepting a disease model, and as such, perhaps unwittingly supporting the cultural forces of reaction that delay the social changes essential to the prevention of emotional distress (Johnstone, 2000). If distressed individuals are suffering from an unknown and undiscovered illness rather than trying to cope with a hostile and sometimes ‘immoral’ social environment, then the strategy for action calls for discovery of the cause of the disease rather than the social action often necessary to change some of the de-humanising forces of society (Conrad & Barker, 2010; Burr, 2015).

My increasing awareness of the social and political causes of distress, led me to want to carry out my own research on the military identity of reservists using qualitative methodologies. I also recognise the importance and utility of quantitative methodologies and data, and will continue to conduct and utilize the findings of quantitative research as my career develops. Yet the classification of human experience through statistical condensation of numerical data and the inequitable distribution of power it creates, conflicts with my own core values. As a clinician I have witnessed the diverse and subjective experiences of people, and the power of having one’s story heard. It is therefore my belief that reality is pluralistic, and socially constructed (Burr, 2015).

Quantitative approaches suggest that the researcher is an objective observer of the research process. However, my own clinical, academic and research experiences

have led me to a view consistent with many qualitative researchers that this detached position is unrealistic, as the researcher position will almost inevitably influence research decisions and interpretation of the data. In line with this, reflexivity is therefore an important process in qualitative research (Berger, 2015), and central to the hermeneutics of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Larkin, 2009) and my own research. Without the continual cycle of reflection and interpretation, I would not have achieved the depth of understanding, and the unconscious meanings of participants' experiences would have remained hidden.

I feel that this philosophical debate is of critical importance to the kind of clinician, researcher and human I have become. Clinical psychology's pre-occupation with being recognised as a 'real science' has reinforced the psycho-medicalisation of distress and therefore the profession may sometimes be unconsciously complicit in placing the cause of mental distress within the individual rather than contextualizing this within its social-political context. My observation is that this maintains a reactive strategy of assuming a therapeutic intervention is the most appropriate way forward, whilst often ignoring the deprivation, abuse, and oppression of society that causes the distress (Proctor, 2006). This response can sustain the status quo (Albee, 2000).

These dilemmas have led me to consider that how we think we ought to offer help to each other in society is not a straightforward evidence-based question. What constitutes evidence, which findings we value most, and what we do with the arguments that we choose to attend to, are all affected by our values. For example, clinical psychology training and the mental health system emphasises the importance

of specific treatment techniques for each of the psychiatric disorders. However, there is also a wealth of empirical psychotherapy literature arguing that the most important factor in therapeutic recovery is not so much what the therapist does but the quality of the relationship between the therapist and client (Bozarth, 2002). However, the latter evidence appears to be often overlooked or under-represented.

In my own reflections regarding this, I feel that there is little to divide my ‘personal-self’ from my ‘clinician-self’ or my ‘researcher-self’. My desire is to be my ‘authentic-self’ in whatever context I operate. Yet identity is complex, and we often present different selves depending on the context we find ourselves (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This is not a static goal, rather a dynamic value-driven and life-long endeavor that relies on the continual awareness of and reflexive position on my way of being. To be my ‘authentic-self’ requires that all my actions are as consistent as possible with my core values. As a clinician, my focus is on the therapeutic relationship and the unconscious therapeutic alliance, developing a co-constructed meaning between the person I meet with and myself. My aim is to have people experience and value their authenticity, to find their own truth so that their true choice can be honoured and heard. Whilst carrying out my research, my researcher position has not been different. Although I am still developing as a researcher, it is important for me to feel that I am representing the complexity of people’s experience rather than searching for a singular truth. In doing so, I hope that the quality of people’s experiences have been represented in my research in a way that honours that complexity, rather than diluting experiences to that which is true or false, accepted or unaccepted. As Smith and colleagues (2009) argue: research findings should ideally epitomise “what it is to be human at its most essential” (p.

38). It is this argument along with the above that attracted me towards the interpretivist position within qualitative research.

### **3.3 Military identity: To serve and protect**

In this section I discuss discusses my own identity as a British Army reservist, my conscious and unconscious motivations for joining the military and for conducting research with reservists and carrying out a literature review on the subject of military servicewomen. Reflections on the parallels with my decision to become a clinical psychologist are also considered.

I began the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology whilst still working as a British Army Reservist, but shortly after it became apparent that I could not commit enough of my time and energy to both of these. My civilian career took priority, and it was with a great sadness and disappointment that I took voluntary discharge from military service early in the second year of the Doctorate. However, I never deployed. Like many of my research participants in the present study, I too had joined the army with the desire to deploy. My hobbies were already suited to a military lifestyle including: wild camping, distance running, and mountaineering. These are all examples of activities I enjoy that challenge my physical and mental endurance and that I could put into practice whilst in military service.

In my view and experience, the army also represents a patriarchal structure, an institution that systematically builds competence and confidence, with well-defined boundaries and definitions of success and failure. I reflected on the possibility that

my desire to join the military may also have been a reenactment of my early attachment experiences (Wilkins, 2006).

My mother and father separated when I was three years old and my stepfather became my male attachment figure. He was an imposing and authoritarian man, physically very intimidating, tough and misogynistic, and he commanded the respect of the house. He was a man who expected everything to be his way, desired routine, and for everyone to conform. Any disagreements would be dealt with using anger and physical discipline. His acceptance was only achieved through compliance.

Whilst carrying out my research I reflected that there were parallels between the relationship with my stepfather and the 'patriarchal institution' of the military and the university. My desire to serve in the military may have been an attempt to gain my stepfather's acceptance, perhaps by embodying the hyper-masculinity that he modeled throughout my youth. I also reflected that my desire to join the military was to try to prove my masculinity; that I could protect myself and stand up to my stepfather.

However, I have also reflected that to join as a reservist perhaps also speaks of my ambivalence, not fully committing to the attachment relationship with the institution, and being able to justifiably defy what I experienced as patriarchal dominance if necessary. Being a reservist, I could more easily engage with the relationship on my terms. There may also be similarities with my relationship with the 'dominant scientific methodology'. As discussed earlier in this chapter, science, medicine and academia can also represent patriarchal institutions. I consider that my desire to

conduct qualitative research may also be an act of defiance against these dominant discourses and ideologies. Furthermore, my focus on reservists' experiences may have been a way to seek to try to protect my research participants from the patriarchal system, by giving them a voice and thereby increasing their sense of agency.

To call myself a reservist feels fraudulent, as I trained for a role that I never fulfilled. I question whether part of my motivation for exploring the topic of deployment, was to live vicariously through my participants own lived experiences. I certainly became excited and gripped by their narratives and wanted to know much more. I feel that whilst carrying out my interviews, my experiences as a reservist and my implicit understanding of the culture and language of military service aided my connection with participants, yet I still felt like an outsider looking in, a 'civvie' who couldn't possibly understand what it was like.

I have reflected on the possible impact my identities and position might have had on my interviews, and wondered if being a civilian and a psychologist may have created a barrier for participants to speak more freely. As a civilian, I wonder if to some degree I may have represented a population who couldn't possibly understand or contain the experiences of deployment. As a psychologist, I feel I may have represented mental health services, with the stigma of weakness and 'madness' leading participants to feel that they needed to appear strong and resilient for fear of being labeled as mentally unwell.

In addition, I reflected on being a man interviewing men. I wondered how the unwritten rules of masculinity may have inhibited participants' emotional expression, and perhaps a feeling that they needed to 'put on a brave face'. It was important to me that I gave participants a good experience of a civilian who could understand and be interested in them. It was also important for me to give my participants an experience of a psychologist who would not judge them, and, so that they would hopefully feel more confident in seeking support should they feel that it was needed. I also felt that it was important to give my participants an experience of a man able to embody compassion, care and emotional containment without it being a challenge to their masculinity.

During my research journey, I also pondered over my decision to carry out my systematic review of the literature with military servicewomen and this also led me to a deeper understanding. During the analysis of the reviewed papers, I reflected on the finding that military servicewomen felt they needed to suppress their feminine identity in order to try to subvert the often 'bullying and abusive' patriarchal institution. I found that I put pressure on myself to do a 'good job' of also giving military servicewomen a voice in the literature review. Again as with my empirical research I felt that I had a desire to protect them and give them a voice. Yet this reasoning in itself became troublesome for me. I found myself questioning the suitability of me as a man providing a voice for military servicewomen as I felt uncomfortable with yielding the power that placed me in the position that I felt of 'rescuer' and perhaps inadvertently maintaining the status quo. However, I also reflected on how being a man working to provide a voice for military servicewomen

challenges the patriarchal institution emphasizing gender binaries, instead representing solidarity between men and women and promoting gender fluidity.

As a young man, I too had to suppress parts of my identity in order to survive the abusive and bullying patriarchal context of my childhood. In carrying out my review, I found I identified with the military servicewomen's experiences, as I too had to walk the thin line of navigating masculine and feminine identities. If I appeared too feminine, and I would risk humiliation and if I behaved too masculine and I would risk confrontation and physical discipline. I adopted 'traditionally feminine traits' of compassion and empathy for instance, to navigate conflict and the difficult experiences of my childhood, as well as to protect my mother and my sister.

Acknowledging how the experiences of my past may influence my decisions, allows me to try to make conscious decisions and manage my personal biases. Rather than reliving attachment relationships, exercising reflexivity allows me to utilise my own lived experiences as a powerful resource. During the research and particularly with the literature review process, I felt I was able to use my protective instincts as a means to promote gender equality and also voice the human rights abusive experiences of military servicewomen. Research supervision and trainee meetings formed a context for discussing the pertinent dynamic issues that were raised during my research.

### **3.4 Identity as a Clinical Psychologist**

The following section provides the author's reflections on the transition from being a trainee to becoming a qualified clinical psychologist. The parallels of this shifting



identity with the experiences of reservists and military servicewomen are also considered.

I have often reflected on my identity as a psychologist. Having occupied a significant portion of my adult life, it has become the dominant narrative, and an embodied part of my self. With professional boundaries being an important ethical consideration, at times it has been difficult to balance myself as a professional and myself as a person, in both my personal and professional contexts. The experiences of my Doctorate training have helped me to reflect on myself as a professional identity and as more personal identities creating a more authentic-self and the ability to manage the multiple identities and roles that I occupy in different contexts. I have been able to refine boundaries so that they are consistent, and developing a way of being that is at its core, psychological and therapeutic. By harnessing compassion, empathy and assertiveness, I have developed better relationships with myself and other people, which are more consistent with my core values.

Nevertheless, at times I have experienced the Doctorate training as ‘abusive and controlling’. The demands on my time and energy have reduced my capacity to connect with those activities that create my ‘authentic-self’. I have become distanced from the people that I care for, and it feels that it is difficult for people who have not been through the same journey to completely understand this. At times, I have suppressed emotions and intimacy in order to remain focused on deadlines and succeeding at the job. In the short-term this has helped to ‘get the job done’, but has also led to some interpersonal conflict.

Simultaneously, friendships forged between fellow trainees amongst the challenges of this academic deployment have been strengthened and challenged as we all share in the excitement and the distress of our experiences. I find myself wondering whether those friendships will drift when the course comes to an end and we all begin a new journey as newly qualified clinical psychologists, and reconnect with our post-training selves.

As I reflect on the ways that my own upbringing and experiences have influenced my research decisions, I also contemplate whether the choice to become a clinical psychologist was ever a fully conscious choice, or whether through my life experiences it has naturally become a part of who I am. Self-reflection, analytical thought and giving voice to the internal experience of ‘often silenced’ people has been an unconscious part of my identity a long time before I started my Doctorate training. However, I feel on reflection that the training has helped me to be more aware of my strengths and limitations so that my strengths become conscious competencies, and my limitations are viewed with compassion and an opportunity to develop.

### **3.5 Final reflections**

I have experienced my research journey as an exciting and challenging aspect of being a clinical psychologist that I have every intention of maintaining as I make the transition from myself as a trainee to myself as a qualified psychologist. Undertaking my thesis research has revealed important themes that apply not only to the context of military deployment, but also to the very nature of what it means to be human.

Identity, belonging, and meaning are all aspects of what it is to be human and as such I have reflected on these parallels in my own life.

Exploring my research identities has been essential to managing my beliefs and attitudes during the process of carrying out qualitative research. In my clinical work, I have held reflective practice in high esteem embracing my thoughts and emotions as a rich and complex source of information with the opportunity for profound personal learning. I perhaps didn't anticipate having a comparable reflective experience with my research, a valued experience that I will take important learning from as I make the transition into my future as a qualified clinical psychologist.

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## Appendix A

Author instructions for the Journal of International Women's Studies General Submission Guidelines:

Submit your article to [JIWS@bridgew.edu](mailto:JIWS@bridgew.edu). Reviews typically take 3-6 months.

Only completed work should be submitted. The editors cannot provide feedback on work in progress.

Abstracts and key words should be included in the same file as the article.

Authors should include a key word or phrase about their research methodology.

The maximum length of any contribution should be 7500 words. Inclusive of notes and bibliography (this can be flexible).

Contributions should be double-spaced, including all notes and references. Page numbers should be placed in the upper-right corner, paragraphs should be indented, and all illustrations and tables should be labeled and captioned accurately. Use Times New Roman, 12 point font, left-justified text, and bold-faced headings. Follow APA or MLA citation styles.

All submissions should include an abstract of 300 words or less and three key words suitable for indexing and abstracting services.

Final submissions following revisions should be single spaced; right justified; bold headings with no space between heading and paragraph including title and abstract; the phrase key words should be italicized; references/bibliographies should be single spaced with hanging paragraphs. Authors should consult recent editions for guidelines and send inquiries to the editor.

In the interests of double-blind reviewing, only the title of the paper should appear on the first page. Authors should include their name and affiliation and any acknowledgements on a separate page.

A brief biographical note of not more than 80 words about each author should be supplied on a separate page.

Contributors should bear in mind the international nature of the journal's audience. Endnote explanations are necessary for all political & geographic references, popular culture references, as well as academic references. Please do not assume that scholars who are famous in one country bear similar prestige elsewhere.

Submission of work to this journal will be taken to imply that it presents work not under consideration for publication elsewhere. On acceptance of work, the authors agree that the exclusive rights to reproduce and distribute the article have been given to JIWS.

Permission to extensively quote from or reproduce copyright material must be obtained by the authors before submission and any acknowledgements should be included in the typescript, preferably in the form of an Acknowledgements section at the beginning of the paper. Where photographs or figures are reproduced, acknowledgement of source and copyright should be given in the caption.

## **Appendix B**

### **Quality Assessment Framework**

(Kmet, Lee and Cook, 2004)

Yes = 2 points. Partial = 1 point. No = 0 points.

#### **1. Question / objective clearly described**

- Yes: Research question or objective is clear by the end of the research process (if not at the outset).
- Partial: Research question or objective is vaguely/incompletely reported.
- No: Question or objective is not reported, or is incomprehensible.

#### **2. Design evident and appropriate to answer study question** (If the study question is not clearly identified, infer appropriateness from results/conclusion).

- Yes: Design is easily identified and is appropriate to address the study question.
- Partial: Design is not clearly identified, but gross inappropriateness is not evident; or design is easily identified but a different method would have been more appropriate.
- No: Design used is not appropriate to the study question (e.g. a casual hypothesis is tested using qualitative methods); or design cannot be identified.

#### **3. Context for the study is clear**

- Yes: The context/setting is adequately described, permitting the reader to relate the findings to other settings.
- Partial: The context/setting is partially described.
- No: The context/setting is not described.

#### **4. Connection to a theoretical framework/wider body of knowledge**

- Yes: The theoretical framework/wider body of knowledge informing the



study and the methods used is sufficiently described and justified.

- Partial: The theoretical framework/wider body of knowledge is not well described or justified; link to the study methods is not clear.
- No: Theoretical framework/wider body of knowledge is not discussed.

#### **5. Sampling strategy described, relevant and justified**

- Yes: The sampling strategy is clearly described and justified. The sample includes the full range of relevant, possible cases/settings (i.e. more than simple convenience sampling), permitting conceptual (rather than statistical) generalisations.
- Partial: The sampling strategy is not completely described, or is not fully justified. Or the sample does not include the full range of relevant, possible cases/settings (i.e. includes a convenience sample only).
- No: Sampling strategy is not described.

#### **6. Data collection methods clearly described and systematic**

- Yes: The data collection procedures are systematic, and clearly described, permitting an “audit trail” such that the procedures could be replicated.
- Partial: Data collection procedures are not clearly described; difficult to determine if systematic or replicable.
- No: Data collection procedures are not described.

#### **7. Data analysis clearly described, completed and systematic**

- Yes: Systematic analytic methods are clearly described, permitting an “audit trail” such that the procedures could be replicated. The iteration between the data and the explanations for the data (i.e. the theory) is clear – it is apparent how early, simple classifications evolved into more sophisticated coding structures which then evolved into clearly defined concepts/explanations for the data). Sufficient data is provided to allow the reader to judge whether the interpretation offered is adequately supported by the data.
- Partial: Analytic methods are not fully described. Or the iterative link between data and theory is not clear.

- No: The analytic methods are not described. Or it is not apparent that a link to theory informs the analysis.

#### **8. Use of verification procedure(s) to establish credibility of the study**

- Yes: One or more verification procedures were used to help establish credibility/trustworthiness of the study (e.g. prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks, external audits/inter-rater reliability, “batch” analysis).
- No: Verification procedure(s) not evident.

#### **9. Conclusions supported by the results**

- Yes: Sufficient original evidence supports the conclusions. A link to theory informs any claims of generalisability.
- Partial: The conclusions are only partly supported by the data. Or claims of generalisability are not supported.
- No: The conclusions are not supported by the data. Or conclusions are absent.

#### **10. Reflexivity of the account**

- Yes: The researcher explicitly assessed the likely impact of their own personal characteristics (such as age, sex and professional status) and the methods used on the data obtained.
- Partial: Possible sources of influence on the data obtained were mentioned, but the likely impact of the influence or influences as not discussed.
- No: There is no evidence of reflexivity in the study report.

## **Appendix C**

### **Author instructions for the British Journal of Psychology**

The Editorial Board of the British Journal of Psychology is prepared to consider for publication:

- (a) Reports of empirical studies likely to further our understanding of psychology
- (b) Critical reviews of the literature
- (c) Theoretical contributions.

Papers will be evaluated by the Editorial Board and referees in terms of scientific merit, readability, and interest to a general readership.

#### **1. Circulation**

The circulation of the Journal is worldwide. Papers are invited and encouraged from authors throughout the world.

#### **2. Length**

Papers should normally be no more than 8000 words (excluding the abstract, reference list, tables and figures), although the Editor retains discretion to publish papers beyond this length in cases where the clear and concise expression of the scientific content requires greater length.

#### **3. Submission and reviewing**

All manuscripts must be submitted via <http://www.editorialmanager.com/bjp/>.

The Journal operates a policy of anonymous peer review. Before submitting, please read the terms and conditions of submission and the declaration of competing interests.

#### 4. Manuscript requirements

- Contributions must be typed in double spacing with wide margins. All sheets must be numbered.

- Manuscripts should be preceded by a title page which includes a full list of authors and their affiliations, as well as the corresponding author's contact details. A template can be downloaded from [here](#).

- Tables should be typed in double-spacing, each on a separate page with a self-explanatory title. Tables should be comprehensible without reference to the text. They should be placed at the end of the manuscript with their approximate locations indicated in the text.

- Figures can be included at the end of the document or attached as separate files, carefully labeled in initial capital/lower case lettering with symbols in a form consistent with text use. Unnecessary background patterns, lines and shading should be avoided. Captions should be listed on a separate sheet. The resolution of digital images must be at least 300 dpi.

- All articles should be preceded by an Abstract of between 100 and 200 words, giving a concise statement of the intention, results or conclusions of the article.

- For reference citations, please use APA style. Particular care should be taken to ensure that references are accurate and complete. Give all journal titles in full and provide DOI numbers where possible for journal articles.

- SI units must be used for all measurements, rounded off to practical values if appropriate, with the imperial equivalent in parentheses.

- In normal circumstances, effect size should be incorporated.

- Authors are requested to avoid the use of sexist language.

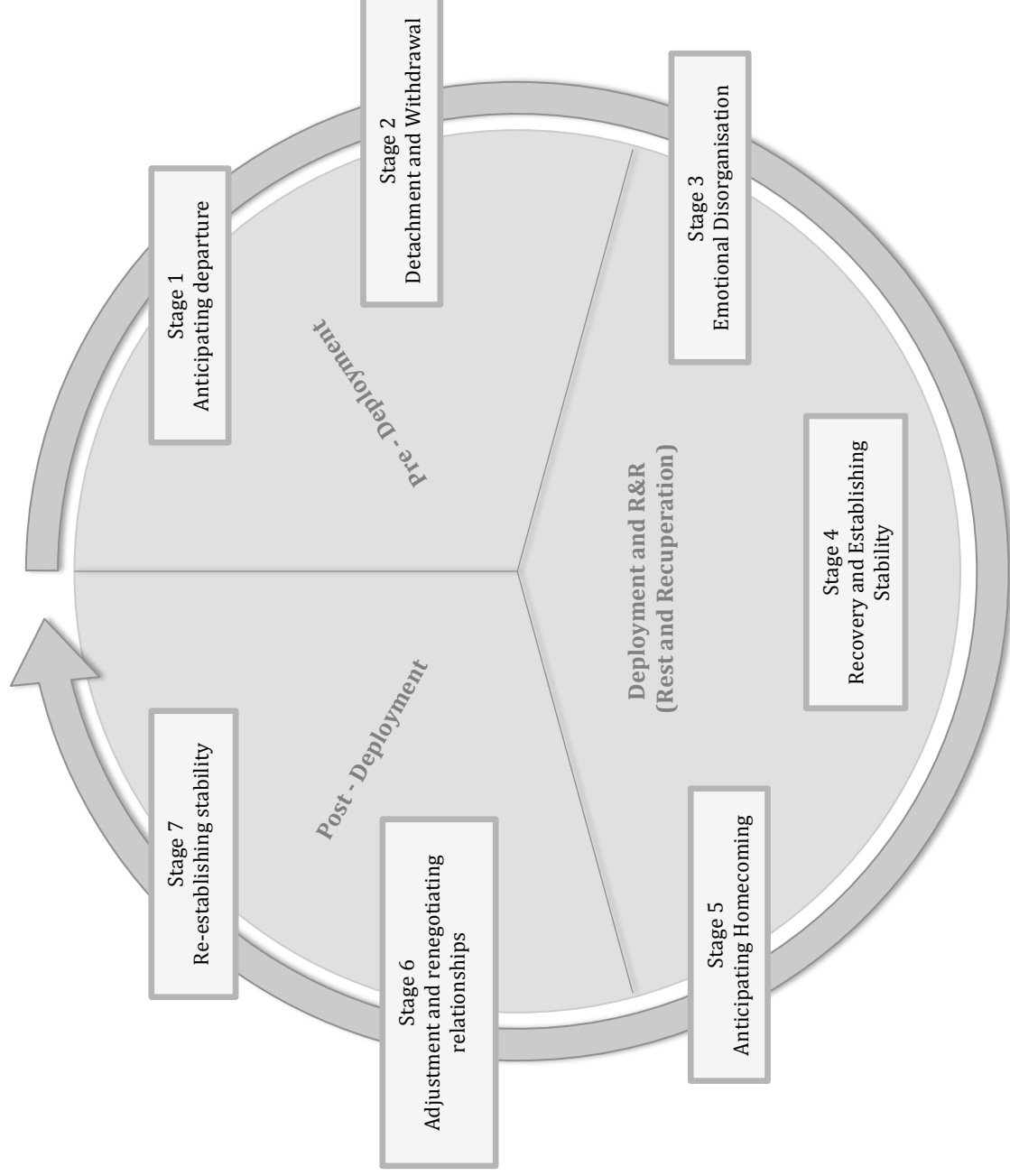
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations, etc. for which they do not own copyright. For guidelines on

editorial style, please consult the APA Publication Manual published by the American Psychological Association

## Appendix D

### Emotional cycle of deployment

Figure 2.1 Diagrammatic representation of the cycle of deployment (MOD, 2011a, 2011b).



## Appendix E

### Coventry University Ethics Permissions

Exploring the lived experiences of UK military reservists during phases of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. P37560

#### REGISTRY RESEARCH UNIT ETHICS REVIEW FEEDBACK FORM

(Review feedback should be completed within 10 working days)

**Name of applicant:** Lee Robinson .....

**Faculty/School/Department:** [Faculty of Health and Life Sciences] School of Psychological, Social and Behavioural Sciences .....

**Research project title:** Exploring the lived experiences of UK military reservists during phases of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Comments by the reviewer

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>1. Evaluation of the ethics of the proposal:</b>   |   |
| This is a very thorough application and ethical issues (and stages of research) have been well thought through.   |   |
| <b>2. Evaluation of the participant information sheet and consent form:</b>   |   |
| These are all clear and well presented with a very good level of detail and information for participants.   |   |
| <b>3. Recommendation:</b><br>(Please indicate as appropriate and advise on any conditions. If there are any conditions, the applicant will be required to resubmit his/her application and this will be sent to the same reviewer). |   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | Approved - no conditions attached   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | Approved with minor conditions (no need to re-submit)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | Conditional upon the following – please use additional sheets if necessary (please re-submit application) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | Rejected for the following reason(s) – please use other side if necessary                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  | Not required  |

**Name of reviewer:** Anonymous .....

**Date:** 08/02/2016 .....

## Appendix F

### Semi-structured interview schedule

(Adapted from Gilbey *et al.*, unpublished thesis)

**Introduction:** *Thank you for agreeing to come for the interview today. The purpose of the interview is to explore your experiences as a UK military Reservist during the different phases of your deployment to Afghanistan or Iraq. This will hopefully feel like a conversation between us, and will largely be led by you as I am interested in you and your experiences. Please take your time in thinking and talking. There are no right or wrong answers but there will be times when I ask you to tell me more about things you have said or there may be times when I stop you to check that you are ok. If you feel you have said all you can about things the interview will come to an end, however if there is still more to say we can follow this up in another interview if you wish.*

**Researcher note:** If the participant has naturally begun relaying some experiences following the demographic questions, follow their lead, if not commence the guide to the semi-structured interview. Researcher note: In order to manage potential distress if participants begin to discuss traumatic experiences encourage the individual not to discuss the traumatic event itself in detail but to briefly describe this and the influence they feel this may have had on their experience of deployment or return home.

#### Demographic Questions:

1. What age are you?

.....

2. What is your ethnicity?

White British White (other) White Irish

Indian Pakistani Black Caribbean

Black African Chinese

Other (please state) .....

3. What is your marital status?

*i.e.* Single, living with partner, married

4. How old were you when you joined the Reserves?

5. What is your regiment, role and rank in the Reserves?

.....

.....

6. How long have you served as a Reservist for?

.....

.....

7. What operational tours were you involved in whilst in the Reserves, and for how long were you deployed?

.....

.....



## Interview Schedule

*General question to open the interview if needed*

**1. So when did you first find out that you were being deployed?**

**2. What was it like for you in the time between call-up and deployment?**

*Possible prompts:*

How did your employer react to the news?  
Were they supportive or not?

How did your family feel about you being deployed?

Were there any particularly positive or challenging aspects to this period prior to deployment?

**3. What were your experiences of pre-deployment training?**

*Possible Prompts:*

Did other members of your unit train with you?

Did you know any of the other soldiers you were training with?

Were there enjoyable/challenging aspects?

**7. So you completed your tour of duty and return home to your family. What is was it like to be home?**

*Possible Prompts:*

What was it like to be back with your family?

What was it like to be back around your friends?

Were there any challenges to being home/returning to work?

How did you cope with those challenges?

**4. What was it like for you and your family when deployment day finally arrived?**

Do you remember much about the journey to Iraq/Afghanistan?

**5. So you arrive in Iraq/Afghanistan. Was it how you'd imagined? What were your experiences as a Reservist?**

*Possible prompts:*

How did you integrate with the rest of your unit?

Were there any particular challenges you experienced?

What helped/didn't help you with those challenges?

What were you experiences of your superiors?

Have any of your experiences on deployment changed you in any way?  
Positively or negatively.

How much contact with your family did you have?

**6. What was it like when you were notified that you'd be returning home?**

*Possible prompts:*

Did this news have any impact on the remainder of your deployment?

### General Prompts

Could you tell me a little more about that

What did that experience/event mean to you?

Could you tell me what you were thinking at the time?

How did that make you feel?

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

## Appendix G

### Recruitment flyer



## ATTENTION RESERVISTS! We Need You!



Ministry of Defence, Crown Copyright 2012

What are your experiences of deployment as a British Army Reservist?

What was it like to be on operations with your Regular Army colleagues?

What were your experiences of support during and after deployment, and what personal resources have you drawn on?

We need volunteers to participate in this important research! Your participation will help others understand more about the experiences of deployment from the perspective of Reservists. Insights gained from your participation aims to inform military policy, guide military effectiveness and facilitate support provision.

#### WHO?

- You must be over 18
- Served as a British Army Reservist
  - Deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan for a tour of duty since 2001
- English Speaking

#### Where?

You will be asked to attend an interview convenient to your place of residence

#### How long will it take?

Interviews last approximately 1 hour

#### How will my data be used?

All data will be anonymised and stored in accordance with the data protection act. It will be analysed to develop themes to help researchers, policy makers and support services understand the experiences of Reservists more fully in the future.

#### Interested?

For more information please contact the Principle Investigator:

Lee Robinson

024 7765 7806

[Robin204@uni.coventry.ac.uk](mailto:Robin204@uni.coventry.ac.uk)



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## **Appendix H**

### **Support Service Information Sheet**

This document contains the contact details of veteran support agencies should you require any further support or advice.

#### ***Big White Wall***

The 'Big White Wall' is an online service for serving and veteran service personnel, their families and carers. The service is an online support group, aiming to reduce the stigma of mental health difficulties of service personnel. The service is free and anonymous

[www.bigwhitewall.com](http://www.bigwhitewall.com)

#### ***Medical Assessment Programme (MAP)***

This is a service run by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It offers a period of assessment, but no treatment. Health professionals can refer to this service free of charge. The MAP is located at St Thomas' Hospital London.

Contact their helpline on 0800 169 5401

#### ***The Royal British Legion***

The Royal British Legion provides welfare to the all serving and veteran personnel and their families.

[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

020 3207 2100

#### ***Veterans Contact Point (VCP)***

This service acts as a single point of contact for veterans their families and carers living in Coventry and Warwickshire, providing support, liaison and advice. It is run by veterans for veterans, and is funded by Warwickshire Probation and SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association). VCP work in close collaboration with other key charities including Combat Stress and the Royal British Legion.

The VCP is based in Nuneaton and Bedworth town hall and is open Monday-Friday, 10am - 4pm.

[www.veteranscontactpoint.org.uk](http://www.veteranscontactpoint.org.uk)

024 7637 6129

[contactus@veteranscontactpoint.org.uk](mailto:contactus@veteranscontactpoint.org.uk)

***Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)***

The SSAFA is a charity aimed at veterans, their family and carers. They offer practical help and assistance with welfare, family support and housing.

[www.ssafa.org.uk](http://www.ssafa.org.uk)

01926 491317

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***Combat Stress***

This is a 24 hour helpline delivered by Rethink for the military community and their families.

[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)

0800 138 1619

***Forcesline***

Forcesline is a free and confidential helpline that is completely independent of the military chain of command.

Available from 10:30am – 10:30pm (UK time) 365 days a year. 0800 731 4880

***Veterans UK Helpline***

Formally known as the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA), Veterans UK provides free help and advice about pay, pensions and support services for veterans, their families and carers.

[www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info)

0800 169 2277

## Appendix I

*Table 2.3 Step by step IPA analysis procedure (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Reading and re-reading transcripts              | Following each interview the transcripts were read repetitively to ensure immersion within the data. Additionally each audio recording was listened to repeatedly to enable reflection on the process and to enhance engagement and awareness with the data. These reflections were kept in a reflective diary.   |
| Initial noting                                  | Transcripts were annotated with initial reflections and notes about each interview. Notes and tentative reflections were written in the right hand margin on the transcript.  |
| Developing emergent themes                      | Researcher interpretations of the participants' narrative were built into emergent themes. This was written in the left hand margin.  |
| Drawing upon connections across emergent themes | Emergent themes were amalgamated to draw upon the most significant parts of the original transcript. These were also written in the left hand margin.   |
| Repeating the process for each case             | The above process was repeated for each transcript. This was a reflexive process, incorporating new themes and to temporarily "bracket off" previously identified themes.   |
| Searching for patterns throughout cases         | Organisation of subthemes into broader categories. Emerging subthemes were assigned a particular coloured highlighter. Subthemes from each participant's account were then highlighted with the appropriate colour. These were cut out from the main body of text and organised into emerging subthemes. This process supported the comparison between participants' subthemes. Final superordinate themes that brought the data into a meaningful and credible account were developed. |
| Identifying recurrent themes                    | Examination of the final superordinate themes to ensure they are representative of the entire data set. To demonstrate each theme direct quotes from all participants were used.  |

## Appendix J

### Example analysis

#### Excerpt 1

hesitant  
Shock  
ambivalent

18 time, um so I put yes... umm... and it would have been a few  
 19 months later then we had the papers through so it wasn't a  
 20 kind of shock you're going to Iraq sort of thing, so I kind of  
 21 knew it was likely to happen...  
 22 A shock? a surprise - partly didn't expect to be called up - partly hoping not to be called up?  
 23 OK, so in a way you volunteered?  
 24  
 25 Yeah... yeah, yeah.  
 26 Lack of choice  
 27 So how did it actually feel when you got the papers?  
 28  
 29 Umm, it was kind of at the time it was kind of like, OK this  
 30 is going to happen then because you get the bit of paper  
 31 and you think ok, because everyone sort of did it and you  
 32 didn't kind of, because I was very young at the time I  
 33 thought well, it might just be one of those bits of paper that  
 34 just goes and you never see it again, so it was kind of, not a

would be interested in... does this suggest to respondent that saying yes is still not a commitment to go? - being interested does not mean that people have made a decision?  
"kind of" uncertain  
"Shock" it was a shock?  
"kind of"  
"knew it"  
"likely"  
expected but unexpected  
known but uncertain?  
tension between knowing & uncertainty  
It is happening vs its likely  
hesitancy - not control  
→ insecure  
→ uncertain  
→ nervous  
→ reluctant  
→ ambivalent?  
"this is..." certainly it's official / real  
"bit of paper" - minimising significance could be thrown away?  
Thinking about why he made the decision - because others did?  
"young" naive } waiting to be grown up?  
? not ready? a man?  
"bits of paper" - minimise  
"never see it again" - disbelief - it won't happen to me?  
hesitant - hesitant to say yes to deploy?  
This is going to happen  
Everyone else is doing it acceptance?  
young & naive  
Disbelief  
young & naive - not fully responsible for actions?



## Excerpt 2

**Shock**  
hard to put into words  
**Real**

35 shock but... just a ... um... I don't know how you would

36 describe or put it... just uh... it made it more real!

37 suppose.

38 The insignificance of filling in a "little" survey. Hard to believe that anything would really come of it perhaps playing the part but not necessarily fully committed to the outcome deeper down. Then the "bit of paper" that holds so much power - a reality shock, an experience phase is complex & hard to put into words

39 So although it wasn't a shock, there was kind of a sense that

40 its...

41 still processing oh-well: resignation / disappointment

42 Yeah its kind of like well you're committed to it now and

43 that's it really... um... not that I didn't want to go... but it

44 was... yeah it was just umm... I don't know how to describe

45 it really ... not unbelievable but you just kind of thought

46 its happening so... you know

47 No choice now - just have to deal with it

48 There it is in your hands

49

50 Yeah yeah... it wasn't a massive shock because we knew it

51 was going to happen... so yeah...

"I don't know how you would describe it" - difficult to put exp into words? Complex; hard to make sense of or understand?

"real" = before that it was false/unreal/phony or just difficult to believe

Kind of "still unsure but committed" - no turning back - can't get out of it

"not that I didn't want to go" - conflicted?

complex/mixed experiences hard to understand & make sense of real but unbelievable Not wanting to believe?

its hard to explain - the letter made it real - you're committed - I'm not sure if I want to go - its hard to believe this is happening → difficult to process

assumption that audience knows & accepts statement as fact → pause - unable to fully articulate something

"Shock" minimised the impact - coping with the impact emotionally

shared - ~~shock~~ shock managed with the group? or unable to be shocked in a group? - I knew this was coming

you're committed now that it's conflicted  
hard to put into words  
hard to believe  
its happening  
hard to articulate  
shared